

Come Sail Your Ships Around Me by bowiebaby

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Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Billy Hargrove's Mother, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Heather Holloway, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Father, Steve Harrington's Mother, Steve Harrington's Parents, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Robin Buckley/Heather Holloway

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Summary:

The Captain comes forwards, filling the space Dustin had previously occupied and squats down. He has a pipe in hand and takes a long puff from it, blowing out smoke in Steve's direction and he huffs, tuning his head and coughing at the acrid smell.

"You're clever, Siren-son."

Steve freezes, turning his head slowly to look back at Captain Billy who grins around the pipe, tonguing the end.

His eyes darkened and face hardens, jaw tightening and he stands, face shrouded again, "I know very well the trickery of Sirens, so don't think you can pull any wool over my eyes."

He stands and turns to the door, "better settle in, Stevie, you're not going anywhere."

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

I am back after a very long break from writing, I am finally feeling inspired again!

This story is inspired by the song by Nick Cave "Ship Song" and it is also inspired by getting stuck on sea shanty tik tok and this flying into my head and being demanding that i write it.

Enjoy reading! As always comments are very welcome, I love hearing what you guys think, I will try to update every day or every other day, not sure how long this one is going to be as I am still writing it but I'm feeling good about it!

He knows he shouldn't be this far from home. He knows these waters are littered with humans and their ships. He knew he could get lost, too fatigued from swimming for so long. The Chief's warning rings through his mind as he swims but still, he swims. He knows he is stupid for coming out this far.

So, he really shouldn't have been as surprised as he was when out of the blue – literally – a cage of rope surrounded him and trapped him where he swam.

He struggles, his tail clumsy as it thrashes, trying to dislodge the hold and only serving to become more tangled. Suddenly, the ropes gave an almighty tug, tightening around him and binding his arms and tail. Another tug and he feels himself dragged up and with a splash, he erupts out of the surface of the water and is blinded by the shining light of the sun.

He can hear the whoops and calls of humans, the sun is still in his eyes as they struggle to adjust to the change from the deep of the sea to the bright white of the surface world. The ropes dig into him as he is suspended for a moment above the water, one of his arms is trapped beneath his back and his shoulder burns from the awkward angle. His rope prison sways and he blinks as the blurry shape of a ship comes into view and he can see the men standing on deck, his

heart leaps into his mouth as he is lowered towards them.

He is deposited on the deck and he writhes in the entanglement of the ropes, only managing to pull them tighter around him, his movements becoming painful as they rub harsh against his skin. He hears those same whoops and hollers all around, men's voices shouting in joy and he sees them surrounding him, hisses, bares his fangs and snaps at anyone that comes to close.

"Keep 'em tight! Don't get too close!"

"I can't believe we actually caught one!"

"It's already changing!"

He feels his stomach drop as he cranes his neck to look down at his tail. His scales are already losing their shine melting together and human flesh takes its place. His tail slowly separates into two legs, webbed fingers separate into slender digits, his eyes adjust better, his hair softens into fine wisps and his fangs retract into blunt teeth. He hasn't been in his human form for a long time, not fully anyway. Like this, he is clumsy, out of practice and in less of a state to fight. He doesn't have his claws or teeth and the fear whips through him like ice through water as he realizes how helpless he has suddenly become.

"Get the Captain!"

As his eyes adjust, the film that covers them now gone and his human eyes blink around. There are faces all around him, each one peering down at him curiously. Some look afraid, one younger male human with wild, curly hair is closest and stares wide eyed and his mouth hanging open as he takes him in.

Boots thud upon the wooden planks and he turns his head as a few men shuffle aside and a figure steps in front of the glare, silhouetted by the light behind him and he can only make out a mane of thick, curly hair underneath a Captain's hat. The figure is tall and leans down over him.

"Well, well, well," a deep voice says, "look what we've managed to

pick up, boys.”

“We finally got one.”

The voice comes from the direction of the curly haired male and the presumed captain steps forward, now out of the sun and he looks into eyes as blue as his home.

The Captain is young, much younger than he had guessed he would be. He's never seen humans up so close before and he is astounded by the difference in his expectations to the reality. He had always been told they were ugly, pale creatures with sun-wrinkled skin and yellow teeth. He's heard stories of ones with missing eyes or legs, ones with grayed hair that is half fallen out. He's heard of the terrible smell of them and destructible nature of them.

This human is almost the opposite of everything he had thought they would be.

His skin is sun kissed but not wrinkled, it is smooth and dotted with a few freckles. His face is almost cupid like, his curled hair looks like it has soaked up the sun when it glitters upon the waves at sunset and he almost wants to reach out and touch it to see how soft it feels. His teeth are pearly white and his lips are soft pink and curled into a lop-sided grin. His eyes sparkle in mischievous mirth and wander all over his body and only then does he remember he should be fighting his way out.

He tries to kick again and a few men shout, ropes are tugged tighter and he shouts out in pain when it burns against his skin. His almost now completely human skin. Its softer than his scales, fragile and the ropes feel like they are about to cut right through him without a problem. He stiffens and remains as still as he can and just keeps his eyes trained on the Captain.

There is a line between the sculpted brows of the man as he tilts his head to the side to look to where his newly formed legs are bound together in a mockery of his tail.

“A male Siren?”

He turns to look at the boy with the wayward curly hair.

“I never knew there were males.”

The boy shrugs at him, clearly just as confused by this.

He turns back again, shrugging and tilts his head to the side as if in thought.

“Do you speak?”

He hisses in reply.

A few of the crew gasp or murmur in fright, the Captain simply grins and reaches out, tugging harshly on the ropes around his head until they dig in harder and force his neck back until he can look nowhere but at the Captain.

“Am I to take that as a no?”

“Release me.”

His voice is rasped from the angle and lack of use. He knows the human tongue well but doesn't have much cause for using it. The Chief encouraged them all to learn, not to mingle with the humans – never that – but for situations like this. *You might need to pretend to be one of them or to negotiate your way out. Humans are greedy and always want something, there is always use for their words so it is best to know them.* That's what he would always say.

“You know our tongue, that's helpful,” the Captain said, releasing his hold on the rope, allowing a little freedom of movement.

“Do you have a name?”

He laughs, “why would I give my name to you, human?”

His tongue is clumsy around some of the words. He used to teach some of the younglings but once they caught the gist if it they didn't need lessons anymore and no one liked to practice with him much, only El and sometimes Nancy really had any interest in it.

The Captain doesn't seem to have much of an issue with understanding him, just leans forwards, resting his elbows on his knees and clasping ring clad fingers together, smirking, "now, it's only polite, isn't it?"

He gives him a skeptical look and the man actually laughs at him. He presses his palm to his chest, "the name is Captain 'Black-Eye' Bill, but you can call me Billy."

He winks – actually winks – and he feels himself bristle at the audacity of this human.

There is a beat of silence and 'Black Eye' Bill leans forwards, cupping his hand around his own mouth and whispers in a mocking tone, "this is the part where you say your name."

The crew around them erupt in laughs and chuckles and the blond preens at the reaction he is given eyes glinting in mischief and mouth pulled into that infuriating smirk.

"Stevenos," he says through gritted teeth.

Captain Billy actually looks surprised, eyebrows shooting up and his mouth falls into a smile that is almost kind.

"An enchanting name for an enchanting creature, it is nice to make your acquaintance, Steve."

He wants to be irked by the nickname but instead his cheeks flush and that alone infuriates him.

"Well, Steve, I'm afraid we won't be letting you go. We've been hunting your kind for a very long time and you are quite the pretty prize to finally win."

"If you're going to kill me, just get it over with already."

The Captain's face hardens and he stands, the sun once more shadowing his face from Steve's gaze.

"We have better plans for you. Welcome aboard *The Scorpion*, Steve, you're going to be with us for some time. Take him to the brig."

Movement erupts all around at his barked orders and Steve struggles again, hissing and biting but his efforts are fruitless. He is hauled up and brought into the darkness of below the deck. These men are strong and the ropes are unforgiving and before he knows it he is deposited into a new cage, this one of hard iron grates and the door is slammed shut behind him. The ropes are loosened and he struggles his way out of them, lying on the straw covered floor and turns only to see the retreating backs of the men before the door is slammed shut and he is doused in darkness. He hears far away laughter and booted feet moving across the deck above his head.

He can hear the far away roll of the ocean waves and the boat moves with them and his situation really comes into solid reality around him.

He wants to scream, he wants to find his way to his new feet and find a way out of here.

He's so goddamn stupid for coming out this far, what the hell had he been thinking?

Instead, he curls in on himself where he lays and listens.

V

There is no way to know whether it is day or night when he wakes.

His eyes blink open, crusted from his dried tears that were still falling as exhaustion rolled over him and stole him into sleep. The floor is hard even with the thin bedding of straw and his neck aches when he turns his head. He forces himself to sit up and his every muscle feels as if it is on fire, protesting his every movement.

He has only ever felt this pain once before, a long time ago when he was just a youngling and he had been allowed on land for the first time. It was the first time he had changed and he remembers the complete wonder he had felt as he sat in the sun, allowing the sea water to dry from his skin and watched his scales seem to sink into

his skin, smooth out into human skin. He had been afraid when his tail separated for the first time, had expected it to hurt but the Chief had been with them and talked them through it reassuringly. When he was first encouraged to try walking, he had fallen in a tangle of limbs almost immediately and he remembered the peal of laughter his mother had let out before reaching out her own human hand to help him back to his feet. They had all learned to walk slowly that day until they got more confident with it, then they had tried skipping and eventually running. He had found joy in sprinting across the sand, watching it spray up around him as he chased after his fellow younglings, still clumsy on their new legs but full of determination to be the fastest.

He liked how the grains of sand felt between his toes and he spent a time watching them curl and uncurl in the golden grains. It had been a day he would never forget but it had ended like all the others. The Chief lectured them that they were never to come to land without permission, never without an escort, never to change alone unless an absolute emergency. *It is vital to learn the ways of humans to imitate them should you ever need to fool them into thinking you are one of them, but do not seek them out. Humans are murderers and they hate Siren-kind and will kill any they come across.* He made sure each and every one of them learned this and never forgot it.

They had returned to the sea sombrely as the sun began to set, the water licked over Steve's skin as he stepped into it and immediately his scales raised like goose flesh and his legs threaded back together into his familiar tail. His fingers webbed together, his hair thinned into seaweed like tresses and the film slipped over the blur of his eyes until he could see clearly beneath the surface again.

He felt better in his usual form but he was exhausted. The next day, his body ached like death and Chief had allowed them each a day of recovery. He had only been on main land once more since then; the day he was allowed to the surface to watch his parents walk out of the sea, never to return, the Chief's hand heavy on his shoulder as he watched their retreating forms disappear into the trees before letting himself be steered back into the ocean.

A loud, metallic bang erupted him out of his wandering thoughts, making him jump where he sat and his senses set to full alert as the

door opened and some light filtered into the space.

It was the human male, the one with the wild curly hair that had been looking at him with such fascination before. He shuffled into the room with a light swinging in a lantern in one hand, a slab of flat wood laden with food and a mug in the other.

Steve tenses, curling his fingers into fists and misses his claws as he watches the human struggle to get through the door.

“Hey – shit – hang on.”

There is a bang as the human tries to manoeuvre himself into the space balancing all the things he carries. Steve relaxes a little, amused slightly but this youngling’s clumsiness and watches him as he kicks the door open and scrambles into the space before it swings to slam closed behind him again.

There is a beat of silence as they both still in the space, dark before but now light slightly by the small lantern.

“Goddammit, they didn’t even light the candles in here for you? Assholes, honestly, gimme a second.”

The human comes forwards, sets his things down on the ground before the bars of Steve’s cage and tugs out a notebook from inside his shirt. He flips it open to the back and tears out a page before setting the booklet down and rolling the paper into a make-shift taper. He bends and unlatches the little glass door of the lantern he brought with him and dips the taper into the flame until it is light and he straightens, cups his other hand around the small flame and carefully moves to a pillar beside him. Steve can now see there is an iron setting nailed into it holding a well-used candle and the human stretches up onto his tip toes until he lights it. Steve watches as he shuffles about from pillar to pillar, lighting each candle he finds in the room until the space is illuminated in a soft orange glow and Steve can actually see the room he is imprisoned in.

Its bigger than he expected but still cramped. There is two more cells to his right and three more lining the wall opposite with a small corridor of pillars in between. Each cell is bare of anything apart

from his own filled with straw and the remnants of his rope prison.

The human blows out the remaining flame when he finishes with the last candle and turns, grinning a toothless grin at Steve, eyes squeezing until they are almost closed in genuine joy at his accomplishment and it is strangely endearing to see.

“There, better?”

Steve nods as he shuffles back closer to him again, setting himself down on the floor outside Steve’s cage and looks at him, still smiling. His eyes wander over Steve where he sits and his cheeks redden when they reach his hips, darting up to the ceiling.

“Um, here,” he stutters, reaching down to his own waist and untying a length of cloth there. He slips it through the bars, eyes still averted and tosses it into Steve’s lap.

“I brought that for you too – ah, for modesty.”

Steve picks up the cloth, confused. Modestly? What was so modest about being in his human form? Did the humans see it as some abomination?

He bristles and is ready to toss the cloth back to the youngling before pausing. *He* wore cloth. Each of the crew that he had seen wore cloth, so did the Captain. Steve had only seen one or two humans before and they had each worn cloth too. It must be some human thing, some silly rule that they must cover their forms with cloth. Perhaps this youngling blushed because he simply was unused to seeing his kind without.

Steve shuffled the garment around in his hold until he found a hole with a pattern around the edges like the ones around the human’s neck. He pulled it over his head and glanced at the human to gauge where his arms should go. The cloth was like the cloth the human wore, though a lighter color. It swamped Steve’s body slightly and he wondered if it had been borrowed from someone else since the human was smaller than him. It draped across his lap, covering as much skin as Steve could make it, ended just at his bent knees. The sleeves dipped a little past his fingers but he rolled them up. When he

stilled, Dustin chanced a glance back to him and gave him a relieved smile when he saw he was now covered.

“I brought you some scraps,” he says, picking up the slab of food covered wood and holds it close to the bars.

“Fruit?”

He nods enthusiastically, “I know your kind prefers hunting fish but this is all we have spare. I have spent my whole life researching your species, I’ve always wanted to learn about Sirens and I learned what I could from the books in the ports we go to, but they are mostly fables and children’s bedtime tales.”

The boy speaks fast and his other hand moves about erratically in his excitement, nearly toppling the plate more than once. He passes Steve bits of fruit as he speaks, seeming to be paying 1% of his attention to it, far too eager to get his words out.

Steve takes the fruit warily but far too hungry to refuse, throwing almost the whole vine of grapes into his mouth at once and chewing gratefully.

“I’m Dustin,” he said at last, leaning forwards to hand Steve a mug of water that was buried in among the fruit.

Steve takes it from him carefully, the flagon only just fitting though the bars. He gulps it down, only now realizing how thirsty he had been and wipes a hand across his mouth when he finishes it. Its sweet, not like the sea water he is used to, but it is welcome nonetheless.

“Steve.”

The boy beams and nods, watching as Steve chews the fruit slower, handing him piece after piece as Steve swallows each mouthful.

“You don’t mind being called that? The Captain can be a wind up, you said your full name was Stevenos? Is that a common name for Sirens?”

Steve wanted to laugh, wondering which question this Dustin would

want him to answer first.

“I was named for a flower.”

“A flower? Like a sea flower? Coral?”

Steve made himself take long, slow sips from the mug of water, choosing his next words carefully. He didn't want to give too much away, this human was surprisingly easy to talk to.

“A land flower. Stephanotis.”

Dustin's eyebrows raised and he set the now empty plate on the floor by his feet.

“You know land flowers? Do Sirens go on land often?”

Steve nearly rolled his eyes, snapping his mouth close just in time as he was about to tease the young human for his lack of knowledge despite his years – however many there actually were – of research. He struggled to find an excuse and resolved to stay quiet.

“Sorry, I get it, I know you won't want to talk about your kind. I just, I've never seen one of you before, never mind get to actually talk to one. It's amazing.”

Steve watched the boy give him another gummy smile. This human was surprising too, like the Captain had been. He had always been told of awful, grown, bearded men who had yellowed teeth and eyes and stank of rum and took pleasure in torturing and killing whatever they could. He couldn't imagine this being harming a single soul. His chest twinged in sympathy for him. Steve had always had such a curiosity for humans, despite the stories the Chief had told them. Perhaps it was not so different for a human to have a curiosity for his kind. Maybe it was innocent. He didn't trust the Captain, nor the rest of the crew, but this boy seemed to genuinely just want to learn a little about him, so some harmless information would surely remain as that?

“We go on land. Sometimes. My Mother named me, she loved land flowers and the Stephanotis was her favorite.”

Dustin's eyes light up in surprise, clearly not expecting Steve to answer him anymore. He shuffled closer in the little stool and followed Steve's hand as he gestures to his legs, folded beneath him in the straw.

"You can see we have legs out of water. We just don't survive very long out of it."

It was half a lie, but Dustin didn't seem to detect his deceit. He grabbed the stuffed notebook from the floor beside him along with a worn down pencil and began scribbling in it excitedly.

"Is it dangerous for you to be on land? Well, aside from hunters. I mean, is it harmful? The change?"

Steve picked up a strand of straw and began picking it, mulling his words over in his mind before saying them.

"We can dehydrate easily and need to return to the sea to revive us."

"What's the longest you can go out of water?"

Steve bit the inside of his cheek, choosing his lie, "for younglings, perhaps an hour at the most. For those of us who are fully grown, maybe eight hours, give or take."

Dustin looked up from his scribbling then, eyes wandering over Steve worriedly, "it's been almost four hours since we caught you. What will happen to you?"

Steve's heart quickens at the glimpse of opportunity. Perhaps, if he chooses his lies carefully, he can find some way to be allowed out of this cell. If they hadn't killed him already, perhaps they intended to keep him as a human attraction. If he could convince them that he would die soon and be useless to them, maybe he could find some way for them to return him to the water.

"I will start to get tired. My skin will dry out and begin to break, I will die eventually if I am not returned to the sea and I will be of no use to you or your Captain."

Dustin chews his words carefully and Steve watches him avidly,

anticipating his next words.

“Maybe I can say to Billy about getting something made for you, to keep you in and make sure you don’t get ill. I’m not sure – we won’t reach our next port until tomorrow ...”

Steve is about to protest when the door is thrown open behind Dustin, making both of them jump.

“Dustin! What did I tell you about speaking to it?”

The youngling flies to his feet, knocking his journal and a mountain of notes crammed into it to the floor as a familiar curly head enters the brig.

“Captain!”

The Captain’s face is stern. He stands tall, shoulders squared and assesses Dustin with a harsh gaze. His eyes glance over to Steve, brow quirking at the cloth now covering him, then down to the empty plate and flagon on the floor by Dustin’s feet.

“I said to feed him, not become his best friend.”

“S-sorry, Billy, I was just wanting to get some more research for my _.”

“- is that my shirt?”

“-uh.”

Steve glances down at the fabric and suddenly feels his skin crawl.

“Max said you wouldn’t ca-”

“- Mr Henderson.”

Dustin slams his mouth shut at the cutting tone of Billy’s voice and then scrambles to pick up his notes and the plate. He glances to Steve apologetically before turning and hurrying out of the room. A few of the crew stand in the doorway, one man looks at Steve with his lip curled in obvious disgust, a hand on the hilt of his sword at his waist.

His face is dusted with so many freckles and his hair is cropped short but spikes up around his head like a sea urchin. Steve fights the laugh at the thought and drops his gaze to the floor.

The Captain comes forwards, filling the space Dustin had previously occupied and squats down. He has a pipe in hand and takes a long puff from it, blowing out smoke in Steve's direction and he huffs, tuning his head and coughing at the acrid smell.

"You're clever, Siren-son."

Steve freezes, turning his head slowly to look back at Captain Billy who grins around the pipe, tonguing the end.

"Dustin might not know much about your kind, but I do. I've had plenty of dealings with your people."

Steve's eyes widen, this must be a lie. Some trick. His kind did not go near humans, any who dared would never reveal their secrets. This human had to be bluffing.

The Captain seems to notice his distress and drops his grin, puffs on his pipe again, this time canting his head back to blow the smoke up to the ceiling. He lowers his gaze back to Steve slowly and leans forwards a little, voice dropped to an almost growl that only Steve is meant to hear.

"You can't trick me with your lies. I know you can spend however long you may wish out of the sea, so long as you get a good soaking every once in a while. I know when you get your legs you are all human, every inch of you. I know you are at your most powerful in the water and that your song can have a man dash himself upon the rocks."

His eyes darkened and face hardened, jaw tightening and he stood, face shrouded again, "I know very well the trickery of Sirens, so don't think you can pull any wool over my eyes."

He stands, tongues at his pipe and turns to the door, "better settle in, Stevie, you're not going anywhere."

He stalks out of the room in one last puff of smoke and Steve sees one

last glare from the freckled crewman before the door is once more slammed shut. He is doused once more in the quiet solitude of his cell, now light by Dustin's candles, but alone nonetheless.

His heart thunders in his chest and his palms moisten with anxious sweat. The Captain knows more about his kind than Steve had assumed. How, he has no idea. He must have caught one of his kind before and tortured them for information or something. There isn't many of them, his clan is one of the only ones in these waters left and they preach the secrecy of their ways.

Somehow, this Captain knows more than he should and Steve doesn't know how far that knowledge extends. He has the upper hand over the Siren and for the first time, Steve feels utterly and completely helpless.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

She still just sits there, eyes wandering over him until she seems to break herself out of her own trance, blinking and shaking her head a little as she sits up straight. She picks up the now empty plate and mug and stands, kicking off some straw that sticks to her trousers.

“I’ll get someone to empty your bucket and find you a change of clothes.”

He just watches her as she turns and toes open the door, looking to him one last time as she keeps it open with her foot.

“I’m Robin.”

He blinks for a moment then presses a hand to his chest, “Steve.”

She gives him a smile then – a proper smile and then she’s gone, the door clattering shut behind her.

Steve doesn’t see Dustin again after that.

He doesn’t know how long he has been in this cage. The lack of windows means the room is always in a state of darkness, save for the candles. Crewmen bring him food every now and then, always someone different. They don’t look or even react to him at all. They don’t speak to him, no matter if he shouts. They just come in, deposit his food and take the empty tray once he has finished and leave again. He has a mess bucket that he relieves himself in and he waits for them to open his cage to empty it, but so far, no luck. The place starts to smell of it and the musk of his sweat. The room is warm during the day and cold at night. He had been given a blanket but nothing much more than that.

He feels like he is going to go insane before he ever gets out of here.

He fills his time by practicing using his legs. It's difficult on the swaying ship, the ground unsteady beneath his own unsteady feet. He can only walk three paces from one end of his cell to the other and it isn't much of an exercise for him. He stretches sometimes, he does some exercises the Chief taught them to strengthen their legs if they ever find themselves spending longer than planned in them. He tires easily, still growing muscle and getting used to using these new limbs.

Being human is strange. His hearing is different. In the water, they mostly rely on sight and the changing of the currents and temperature of the water to manoeuvre his environment. His hearing has never been a priority, he doesn't even have ears under the water. They feel strange on either side of his head. But it is incredible to use them. He can hear so much when he really concentrates on it. Sometimes he sits for what feel like hours with his eyes closed and just listens. He can hear the rolling of the waves outside, the groan and creaks of the wood of the ship. He can hear the footsteps on deck above, some thudding bare feet and others clicking boots. He can hear the call of birds sometimes too. Once, he even heard some of the crewmen singing and craned his neck eagerly to hear more.

He loves music. In his Siren form, he has a lovely Siren-song. Joyce used to joke that he would charm all the sailors and maidens if he ever tried to properly use it. If the Chief had not forbidden it, that was. As a human, his song is useless, his voice deep and raspy and all too human to be anything beautiful.

The boredom seems endless when he runs out of things to do. He has searched every inch of the place for something to get him out, some way he could claw his way to freedom. He tried prying the bars apart but his arms are thin and weak. He tried ramming his body against them but only served to bruise his pale skin. He tried finding a hole or some give in the wood wall of the ship but no luck. He once even tried to untie the ropes of the nets and fashion some kind of lasso to pry the door open but a big crewman had come in to give him his food and saw what he was doing and taken the ropes from him without a word. He was left with just his shirt and his weak human body and no hope of ever escaping.

He thought about his clan. He wondered if they would be looking for him. The Chief would have sent a search of the warriors but even they aren't allowed very far out of their waters. He wonders what Nancy would be doing now. He wonders how El is doing with her lessons, if she has been taken to the surface for her first change yet. He wonders if she is worrying about him and imagines her angry little face when the Chief tells her no, she can't go out to find him.

He feels stupid most of all. Regretting more than anything his decision to come so far out of the waters in the first place.

The door clangs open, making him jump and he wobbles to his feet. He has learned by now to stand with his back pressed against the far wall. It both for their benefit as much as his own. They trust him enough to come close to the bars and set the food down on the floor before them before backing away, and he can stay still and out of reach and watch every move they make. At first, he had hissed and spat at any who came near so they had set his food well outside the cage which forced him to lie on his belly and extend his arm as far as he could reach to get at his food. Compliance means he is fed and if he is fed at least he has some strength.

As always, someone new comes through the door with his food, but he is surprised to see it is a female human. She is attractive, he might even go as far to say beautiful if she had been something other than human. Her hair is short, reaching just past her ears, sleek and shiny where it pokes out from under a scarf wrapped around her head. She wears an assortment of jewelry that clinks and sings as she moves into the room, balancing his plate of food carefully as she shuts the door behind her.

She is tall, perhaps as tall as he is when standing, slender and dressed like one of the males. Her eyes are wary as they look him up and down, but she smiles at him, and it's far more than any of the others have done since Dustin.

"You know the drill," she says, gesturing to him to sit down in his place near the door as she sets the plate down on the other side of the cage. Her voice is different than he expected a female human to sound like. Raspy, deep, but still pleasant. He takes his seat, making sure his shirt – now far past its fresh state – is covering him for their

modesty, as Dustin told him.

She nods when he is settled, and he takes that as invitation to eat. There is some fish this time, though it is dry and flaky, tasting like nothing. He doesn't complain, it's better than the fruit he is usually offered. There are some other foods there he isn't so sure of in bright colors and different textures, but they taste good and he eats them eagerly all the same. There are round, red things that when he bites into them burst in his mouth with seeds and juice. He likes them most, always glad when they are brought to him.

"It stinks in here, has Tommy not been emptying your bucket?"

He pauses only momentarily in surprise when the female human speaks. She watches him while he eats. He wonders if he does it different than they do. They seem curious about it. Perhaps they don't expect him to be able to eat their food, perhaps they are just waiting for him to pull some miraculous escape plan with the food they bring him. He doesn't entirely understand her word choice, but the wrinkle of her nose tells him enough. He knows it smells; he's had to sit in the smell for however long he's been in here. It's not exactly his fault. He ignores it, turning his attention back to the fluffy gold things, picking one up and shoving it into his mouth whole. The skin is crispy on the outside and its still warm inside where he bites into fluffy, dry something. It dries his mouth as he chews it and when he swallows it goes down like sand and he straightens his spine, trying to ease its passage as it makes its slow, painful decent to his stomach.

"Slow down, you're going to choke."

He glances up to her, still struggling to swallow the food and she tuts, holds out his mug of water to him and he takes it, gulping down a mouthful and feeling it ease his throat. The stuff tastes good but he shouldn't have ate it whole, he thinks.

"Potatoes always get me too if I eat them fast," she says with amusement in her tone, "Ill try to get some butter next time, if Dustin doesn't get to it first."

She takes his mug back from him and watches him finish up the small

pieces of fruit left on the platter. He eats them slowly, savoring the sweet juice of the grapes. She just sits there, looking around her, looking at him, smiling that small, almost friendly smile. She really is pretty, he decides. Freckles dust her skin and her eyes are a lovely aqua blue.

He doesn't know why she is being friendly to him. Perhaps she is like Dustin; curious about his kind and just wanting to study him. Unlike Dustin, she's quiet, she hasn't asked him any prying questions – nothing about himself or his kind. Her eyes keep wandering over him, though. They don't fully settle anywhere, not on his eyes like normal to do when having a conversation. They flick about his face, up to his hair, down to where his skin disappears beneath the dirty fabric of the cloth he wears, down to his legs that are folded beneath him. She doesn't blush when she looks at him, not like Dustin had. She just simply assesses.

“You look so much like us,” she says at last, after he has finished his food and drink and sits in silence before her. He meets her eyes when she says that, her voice a little breathless.

She peers into his eyes, a slight crease between her brows, “you could so easily be human, no one passing you in the street would have any idea.”

He drops his gaze, not daring to trust himself to speak.

It's true, though he has never seen what he really looks like – human or Siren – he knows that his kind can walk in human skin well. It's very hard to tell them apart, almost impossible. Only someone looking for it would see the slight translucence of his skin, where its iridescence shimmers ever so slightly, or the way his eyes sometimes glaze over with the film that usually covers them which retreats behind his lids when not needed, or the way his pupils dilate and slit depending on his mood. He's calm now, supposes his eyes look normal, but he knows when they first captured him they probably saw him half human half monster, even when his scales had faded away his fangs still bared and his pupils hostile slit. It's hard to control that part, he's not had the practice. Hopper can bare his fangs on command even in human form, but it takes a great deal of practice and handling of his own emotions that he's just never had.

To them, to this female, to this crew, he's as human as human can be, and he doesn't plan on enlightening them any time soon. Not without practice.

She still just sits there, eyes wandering over him until she seems to break herself out of her own trance, blinking and shaking her head a little as she sits up straight. She picks up the now empty plate and mug and stands, kicking off some straw that sticks to her trousers.

"I'll get someone to empty your bucket and find you a change of clothes."

He just watches her as she turns and toes open the door, looking to him one last time as she keeps it open with her foot.

"I'm Robin."

He blinks for a moment then presses a hand to his chest, "Steve."

She gives him a smile then – a proper smile and then she's gone, the door clattering shut behind her.

V

With Robin's retreat, Steve feels a new sense of purpose.

So, as much as the Captain would have him think otherwise, the humans don't know everything about him. They think he is human completely in his form so long as they keep him away from sea water. It's a half truth, but he is a creature of the sea through and through, never truly human.

He focuses in the time he has alone in there to tap into that part of him. He tries to remember what Hopper had told him. He tries to

remember how he felt that first moment he had been captured by these pirates, the terror and fear coursing through him and the fury that he should have been so stupid as to get caught in the first place. It's useless to try and make himself angry, it's not a big enough spike of emotion for him. It's not even all emotion that is required to do it. Emotions help, they fuel the fire, but its *instinct*- pure and basic instinct of an animal that he needs to tap into.

He rubs his fingers together, he can almost feel his claws beneath the thin skin, straightens them out like he could see them, but he can't. No more than he can see his bones. Running a tongue over his gums doesn't find his fangs either, just smooth skin and very human, blunt teeth.

The door clangs open, making Steve jump, breaking him out of his concentration. He scrambles to his feet as a figure fills the doorway. It's the man from before, the one with the spiked hair and the freckles that had sneered at Steve over Billy's shoulder. Steve presses himself against the wall as he is supposed to and watches warily as the pirate shoulders his way into the room, plate and mug in hand.

The door slams shut behind him and for a moment they both just stand there, staring at each other through the bars of Steve's cage.

"Fuck, it smells like a stable in here," the man scoffs, wrinkling his nose up and looking Steve up and down, "don't your kind know how to keep themselves clean?"

Steve bites his tongue against the retort. This male exudes nothing but ill energy, he's sure that whatever he would say in return would land him nothing but trouble.

"Wouldn't think so," the freckled man continues, dropping his gaze to deposit the food on the floor before the bars, mug also.

"Can't expect savages to be anything other than that, can we?"

Steve keeps his eyes to the plate of food, bristling to see its nothing more than a few scraps of bread and a few pieces of chicken. No nice vegetables or those potatoes Robin had fed him before.

Tommy remains standing where he is, watching Steve with that curled lip of his. Steve doesn't dare move, the others had left him some semblance of peace while they watched him eat. Dustin sat and chattered with him – or at him – Robin has smiled and just observed him, even the few that came before her had sat back from the cage, only giving him a few glances, one had just sat polishing his weapon and paid Steve no mind at all while he ate. It wasn't perfect – it was far from ideal – but it was better than this, whatever this was.

The human watched Steve's every move, eyes wandering across his body occasionally, but not out of curiosity, his eyes were sharp and unfriendly, and his face never lost that look of complete disgust.

"Such a pale, skinny creature," the human muttered, "it's a waste even feeding you, don't know why Cap insists on keeping you alive."

Steve's heart gives a little flutter as his mind stumbles to understand the words.

"Come on then," the man says, sounding impatient suddenly, "eat your scraps so I can get out of here, this smell is making me sick."

Despite his words, the male doesn't back away from the cage – on the contrary, he comes closer, standing in the space next to his food, arms resting on the cross bars before him. He sneers at Steve though the iron, sharp teeth glinting and there is no power in all the seas that would compel Steve to come any closer to him.

"Come on, Fishstick, eat or you go hungry, I couldn't give a shit."

Steve's stomach grumbles unhelpfully, curling in pain with how empty he feels. It must be nightfall by now, humans get hungry so fast.

Against his better judgement, he slides down the wall slowly and crawls forward to the bars. The pirate watches him all the while, face cast in slight shadow as he tilts his head down to observe. Steve just about snatches up a piece of the bread and the mug and shuffles back a little, not quite to the wall, but a little further from the bars than he was. He shovels the dry stuff into his mouth and chews it, sloshing some water in to soften it and make it faster to eat. Like this human

said, the faster he eats, the faster he gets rid of him.

“God, you’re like a dog.”

He ignores him, focusing on his chewing and drinking, counting down the seconds.

He swallows and takes another gulp before reaching forwards for the other slice.

A boot comes stamping down on the plate, squashing the rest of the food beneath it. Steve freezes, hand still raised through the bars for it. The boot shimmies from side to side, squashing any semblance of food left into a pile of mush. The pirate then raises his foot higher, the bread and chicken a stomach-turning mush stuck to the sole of the leather and he holds it out before Steve’s nose.

“Come on then, dog, eat up.”

Steve recoils, shuffling back to far corner of his cage and curls his own lip in disgust.

The Pirate laughs, loud and bellowing and it makes Steve jump. He drags his foot through the straw, wiping off the mush of food and straightens, tilting his head with a cruel grin as he watches Steve glare at him from his corner.

“For the best, I guess,” he says, “the less we feed you, the less mess to clean up after. Speaking of...”

Steve feels his blood run cold when the male reaches into a pocket and pulls out a string of metal rods. He’s seen them before – they are the same ones the Captain had when he first got deposited in here, the ones the pirate that had confiscated his rope from him carried, they’re the things with which they can open his cage.

The freckled man thumbs through them, whistling something as he does. Steve shudders when he makes a triumphant noise and slides one of the rods into the lock and twists it with a click. The door flies open before Steve even has the chance to decide what he’s going to do.

Tommy fills the space more than Steve expected. This close and without the barrier of the bars, he's bigger, taller, towers over Steve and grins down at him, clearly enjoying Steve's squirming.

"You know, I never really understood the obsession with your kind," he says, "heard the stories of you lot being these pretty creatures that could sing sweet songs to make men fall in love."

Steve glances to the door, its still open behind the pirate.

"Looking at you; all skin and bone, it's hard to believe. You look like I could snap you in half."

Steve moves slowly, tucking his feet under himself and gets ready to spring.

The pirate lashes a hand out and Steve yelps, gets dragged up to stand and shoved against the wall behind him, Tommy spitting in his face.

"Cat got your tongue, Fishstick?"

"Let me go."

The man laughs, that stupidly loud bellow and Steve grimaces, looking beyond him to that door.

"Think you can command me like that? You're our prisoner – not even that. You're a creature pretending to be a man, it's an abomination."

Steve sags a little, the pirate's breath is sour and his teeth are yellowed, his face burns red, making those freckles stand out and his hair is wild, making him look scarier than ever.

"Always wondered what you've got under there, though, is it really all pretending to be human?"

Steve frowns in confusion at those words but yelps when the man's other hand comes to tug up the hem of his shirt from where it almost reaches his knees.

Steve screeches, shoves with all his might against the pirate's hold and he doesn't seem to be expecting it. He stumbles back, tripping over the mess bucket and spilling the contents over the floor. Steve takes the moment to leap forwards, making it out of the cage and throws the door closed behind him. He stumbles on his unsteady feet and nearly reaches the door when the gate of his cage bangs open behind him, and a body slams him straight into the door.

Steve lets out a scream of panic before a hand is clamped over his mouth, he writhes and bites down on them and the pirate shouts in pain, ripping his hand away. Steve turns and is blinded by the fist that connects with his eye. He crumbles to the floor where a boot comes to slam into his stomach. Steve sees stars, retches as his stomach contorts from the sudden blow and curls in on himself.

"Fucking heathen! Fuck!"

Steve coughs, feeling like he's about to upend his entire digestive system when the door is thrown open and light floods the room. Shouts of many voices fill the air but Steve's head is reeling. His cheek flares in pain and his entire abdomen feels like he's been hit by a boulder.

"Tommy, what the fuck did you do?"

"Get off it -"

"Hagan for fuck's sake!"

Feet thunder into the room and the Pirate named Tommy is shoved back from Steve. The Siren groans, vision cleared enough to see the way the man seethes at being held back, face red, saliva spraying from his mouth as he shouts profanities at the men holding him back.

"Let me go! That fucking piece of shit deserves it – let me fucking go!"

"Mr Hagan, what is the meaning of this?"

Everyone stills as a familiar voice speaks from the doorway. Steve has by now managed to sit himself up, leaning against the wall by his cage and though he still gasps for air, his stomach has stopped

lurching and his head has stopped ringing.

The Captain stands, filling the doorway. He's got a long, deep blue coat on and his hands tucked into the pockets of it. His stance is wide, feet planted on the floor. His face is stoic and calm but his eyes are sharp, cutting from Steve to Tommy where he's still being held by the two crewmen.

"The fucking thing attacked me, Cap."

Steve opens his mouth to reply but the Captain beats him to it.

"Is that so? This," he says, gesturing to Steve with a tilt of his head, "frail creature attacked you, Mr Hagan?"

The red deepens on Tommy's face, but he chooses to remain silent, glaring at Steve.

"Quite the fighter, we will have to believe, in that case," The Captain continues, stepping into the room.

Dustin and Robin are behind him, hovering in the doorway with worried expressions on their faces, Dustin pale as he watches Steve heave for breath against the wall.

Captain Billy stalks over to the entrance of the cage, blue eyes looking from the tipped over plate and mug, to the mush of food scraped across the floor, to the upended bucket with its contents spilled across the floor. He tilts his head when he looks to Steve, wandering eyes assessing his arms and legs, his face only briefly before his gaze cuts across to Tommy who rages like a bull against the hold of his fellow crewmen.

"You have made your feeling of the Siren quite clear since you joined out crew, have you not, Mr Hagan?" Billy asks, stepping over to the Pirate.

Tommy just glares back at him.

"In fact, you've been rather vocal about many of my rules on my ship," the blond continues.

The rest of the crew is quiet, watching their Captain as he tilts his head to the side, regarding the man calmly.

“What’s my first rule, Tommy?” he asks, voice low.

Tommy’s jaw flexes and his lips purse, Steve thinks he is going to refuse to answer, but then he says, “every crew member shall obey his commander, in all respects,” he says at last, through gritted teeth.

The air is thick with tension as the two men stare at each other – Tommy seething and red, Billy calm and stoic.

“Gold star, Mr Hagan, and who is your commander?”

“You are.”

“You are, what?”

Tommy’s jaw flexes, “you are, Captain.”

“Aye, and did I not say that this creature is to be treated as precious cargo?”

“He attacked me -”

“- Through iron bars? Or does he have some magic to open the cage himself in order to attack you?”

Tommy slams his mouth shut then and Dustin snorts in amusement from the doorway. Tommy glares over at him but the curly haired boy just smirks back at him.

“A night in the brig will cool you off, Mr Hagan,” the Captain says at last, gesturing to the open cage. The two men manhandle Tommy over there, ignoring his struggling and protests.

“Billy!”

“Fetch a bucket and mop for Mr Hagan, please, Robin,” Billy says, watching Robin nod with a smile and do as told.

Billy turns to smirk at Tommy as he’s thrown into the space, “you can

finish your assigned duty while you are in there and clean up the mess.”

Robin reappears with a bucket and mop and once it is deposited in the cage, the door slams shut and the rod is turned again and Tommy is sealed in. He growls up at the Captain in seething anger as the crewmen begin to file back out the room.

“Reflect on your future with this crew, Mr Hagan,” the blond says, then turns to crouch before Steve.

Steve flinches, unsure what punishment he is going to receive for these dramatics. He prays to the Gods he won’t be forced into the cage with Tommy, at least give him the one furthest away.

“Can you stand?”

The question is posed to him almost gently and Steve takes a moment to frown up at him in confusion.

“Steve? Can you stand?”

He’s not sure, his stomach still pounds in pain and his eye is swollen and burning. He kicks his legs and tucks them under himself, using the wall to balance as he gets to his feet. The movement sets up a new flare of pain in his chest and he doubles over, stomach lurching again threateningly.

“Take it easy,” the blond says calmly and a hand comes to press against Steve’s back.

“Lift him, bring him to my cabin, be gentle with it.”

Steve looks up in alarm as the large crewman who took his rope from him comes forwards, he gives Steve a gentle nod and bends, scooping Steve from the floor gently and pauses, waiting for Steve to give him a gesture that he’s okay.

He’s strong but he holds Steve gently and his chest doesn’t hurt so much, he nods, fingers clinging weakly to the man’s shirt but he doesn’t feel like he’s about to fall. The man ducks his way out of the doorway and into a larger room. Loops of fabric hang all around,

beddings made here and there and he guesses this is where the crew must sleep. The man carries him past each of them to a set of stairs and angles his body to climb them without Steve bumping his head against the wood on either side.

Suddenly, Steve is burst out into crisp, cool fresh air. The sun has long gone from the sky, but the deck is illuminated in a soft orange glow from the lanterns posted here and there. Steve breathes in the salty air deeply and feel like he could cry. His head tilts back and he sees the stars littering the sky and the wisps of cloud here and there. Crewmen watch as they pass, curious eyes watching him warily but Steve its too occupied with the delicious fresh air he didn't realize he had missed so much.

They come to a pair of carved, wooden doors and Robin and another female hurry over to pull them open to allow them passage through. Steve's eyes widen at the room beyond he is carried into.

Its about twice the size of the room he had been kept in. A large bed stands facing them as they enter, sheets looking plush and soft, curtains draped over the posts jutting up at the corners giving it a canopy of privacy. To the left of the room are a few wooden blocks of wood, some with little metal handles attached to them, each covered in endless objects of curiosity that Steve couldn't put a name to. Beyond them is a large window, the sea stretching out beyond. Heavy curtains draped around the arches, tied to the side with gold chords. The man carrying him turn to face the doors they had come from and Steve gets a glance at the other side of the room which boasts a few more strange furnishings and a large glass crate like thing.

His attention was drawn back to the doors as the Captain enters, looking Steve over before nodding to the man.

"Get him in the bath, he needs cleaning."

Steve starts at that, the man making his way over to the glass crate thing only for Steve to see it is filled with water. He stares at the worn, intricate metal edgings of the basin, at the glass that looks slightly worn and old, at the way it was designed perfectly to fit him but seemed far from new.

The man lowers him in gently and Steve could have cried, feeling the cool water lick over his skin as he is deposited in. Its deeper than it looks, bigger too, fits him in neatly with a little extra room. It's freshwater, he realizes with disappointment, his skin remaining pale and smooth. The man straightens when he is sunken in fully and tugs the soiled shirt over Steve's head before nodding and leaving the room.

The Captain thanks him and nods as Dustin and another boy hurry forward.

"Check in case he's bleeding inside, Lucas," Dustin said to the boy who nods and presses gentle fingers against Steve's abdomen, peering at his pale skin closely. Steve didn't mind the poking and prodding, recognizing it as their form of healing when Dustin cradles his head gently and frowns at his eye.

"I don't think he's done too much damage," Dustin says, more to the Captain than to Steve, "doesn't even need stitches, just something cold to bring the swelling down."

"His insides seem good too," Lucas says, straightening from where he had been assessing Steve's ribs, giving the Siren a small smile, "just need some rest to heal up, was a pretty hard kick."

Steve shudders at the memory of it, he's been hit before, trained a little with some of the warriors of the clan, but nothing like that.

"Bring him a damp rag for his eye and leave us," the Captain's voice comes from the other end of the room and Steve sees him sitting behind one of the wooden units with his booted feet kicked up on its surface, puffing on his pipe as he lights it with a taper.

The two boys do as told, Dustin giving Steve a relieved smile before leaving. Steve's stomach lurches at the thought of being alone with the Captain in his quarters. He's not sure what punishment he's in for, not really sure he wants to know – we would rather just get it over and done with.

He sits motionless in the water, glancing warily to the blond as he extinguishes the flame of his taper with a flick of his hand and takes

a long puff from the pipe. The door swings open again, and Lucas comes back in holding a bowl with water in it and a cloth. He sets it down on a surface next to the glass crate within Steve's reach.

"Hold it against your eye, it will sting like a bitch but it will take the swelling down a bit, do it for a bit until it feel better and make sure you don't touch it otherwise, got it?"

Steve nods dumbly at the boy and he grins at him, seemingly satisfied that Steve understood him and with a salute that almost looks sarcastic to Billy, he leaves the room, the door clicking shut behind him.

Steve watches as the Captain rolls his eyes at the door before kicking his feet down to the floor and puffing on his pipe again.

Steve sits up, reaches for the cloth in the bowl, better to do as he's told while the Captain seems preoccupied. He sinks his hand into the water and can't help but gasp. Its cold, lovely middle of the night cold sea water. His fingers are already threading together with webbing just from the small contact, his claws flexing under his skin, scales rising on the back of his hand.

"Nothing heals a Siren better than the sea."

He jumps at the Captains words, not expecting them to be so close. In the time Steve had been distracted he had moved to lie on the foot of the bed, lazy eyes watching Steve.

"Don't try anything, mind," he says, tone stern and he makes a movement with his hand. Steve's blood freezes when he sees a pistol aimed at him.

"You might have your claws back and I've still let you have your legs, but one move and I'll blow a hole in you, pretty boy, you got that?"

Steve nods dumbly, eyes wide on the barrel pointed right at him. This human is quicker witted than Steve gave him credit for, foiled his escape plan before it had even formed in his head.

"There's soap there if you use it, sand too," Billy says then lies back to look at the ceiling, puffing on his pipe, finger on the trigger.

Steve turns and still when he sees the assortment of bottles on a shelf next to him, but that's not what surprised him. It's the sand. How does this human know that is how his kind cleans? He glances back to the bed but the blond is just lying there casually, blowing rings of smoke up to the canopy of the bed.

Steve puzzles over this human as he brings the pot of sand into the water, soaking it to form a mush and begins scrubbing it into his skin. He ignores the pain in his eye for now, he can soak it once he's clean and feeling fresh. He scrubs every inch of himself, a little awkward in the confines of the basin, a little strange to only be using a little pot of sand and not an entire ocean floor. They don't need to clean much in the ocean – they don't exactly get dirty, but sometimes they indulge it and Steve needs it right now after days of sitting in his human filth.

He looks at the soaps curiously but they smell too strong and they look gloopy and strange to him so he sticks to what he knows. Once done, he sinks his hand back into the basin of seawater and pulls out the cloth, folding it and sets it over his eye, sighing in relief at the cold water seeping over his skin and taking away the fiery heat.

He allows himself to lie back, closing his other eye and just lets himself a moment to pretend he's at peace. The water is lukewarm by the time he opens his eyes again, the cloth no longer as cold. He sits up and pulls it off and places it back in the basin and glances over to the bed.

Billy is still lying there, but his head is tilted to the side and he's just watching Steve.

There is a moment of quiet in the air, Steve not sure what to say or do, the blond just looking at him for a time. He stands after a moment, pistol tucked into the band of his trousers and he comes forwards, takes the bowl and cloth off the stand and looks at Steve for a moment, wandering over his eye.

Steve wonders what he must look like. Half human, half Siren sitting in a glass basin on a pirate ship with a swollen eye. He must look comical; he would laugh if he wasn't so on edge.

“I’m sorry about Tommy.”

That’s the biggest surprise of all and it has him widen his eyes then grimace when his injured once twinges in pain.

“He’s an ass, I should have known he would have tried to hurt you, he’s not exactly fond of your kind. Or anyone for that matter.”

Steve just sits there.

The blond sighs, tilting his head in thought.

“If I allow you some seawater and to remain in this overnight, will you behave?”

This must be a trick. Where was his punishment? Where was the ruthless pirate that would beat him for disturbing his crew? Where was the infamous destruction of humans Steve had heard so much about? Why was this one being almost kind to him? Was he testing him?

Billy raised his eyebrows, waiting for an answer and Steve can’t resist, to get a taste of his home, to get to change even for a bit back to siren, it was too tempting to say no to.

“I’ll behave, I promise.”

Blue eyes assess him for a moment, studying his face before nodding.

“Good, out with you,” he steps back and offers his arm for Steve to take as he gingerly climbs out the tub. Billy leads him over to the bed and sets him down and once more, there is a pistol trained on him.

“Heather!” he jumps at Billy’s bark and after a moment the doors open and in comes the female he had saw before with Robin.

“Get some others and fetch buckets of seawater, empty what you can from the tub and fill it with them,” Billy says, not taking his eyes off Steve. The female looks a bit hesitant but then she scurries out of the room.

A bit of commotion later – which Steve only half paid attention to

while he had a barrel pointed at his face – they are alone again and Billy straightens, lowers his weapon, and retrieves A length of silky looking cloth from one of the little drawer things in the wooden crates. He comes over to Steve and tilts his head up with a gentle prod of his thumb. Steve frowns but does as he is told. The cloth is tied around his mouth.

Steve starts at first but then he figures it out. He's going to be allowed to be in his natural form, but he's not going to be allowed to use his song. How was this human always three steps ahead of him He hadn't even thought of it.

Billy smirks at him, clearly pleased to have outsmarted the Siren yet again.

"I know your tricks, Stevie, remember that."

He does, somehow and infuriatingly, he does. Siren's song is powerful, but its difficult, it requires precision and finesse for it to work, like playing an instrument requires training and playing the right notes. While gagged, he can still use his voice, but its like holding down the strings of a lyre and expecting a song to still come out. Yes, you will get some form of sound, but you won't get the true, beautiful potential.

Damn this Pirate.

"Come on then," the blond says and before Steve can even protest, he's scooped up into his arms and getting carried over to the basin. He expects to be plunked in like a coin in a wishing fountain, but instead, the Captain lowers him in as gentle as he can.

'Precious cargo' was what he had called him before - can't be harmed too much, Steve thinks wryly. The thought doesn't last long, not while he is submerged in the cool water and his scales are forming and he feels like he has spent days in the desert sun and been allowed to slip into the cool water of an oasis.

He groans in bliss, sliding down to submerge his entire body. The rag in his mouth tightens when it gets wet but it doesn't obscure his breathing, his gills doing all the work where they pulse at the sides of

his neck and chest, gulping in the water greedily. He blinks open his eyes, looking about the room through the glass and is surprised when he can't see Billy anywhere.

He resurfaces slowly, waiting for his eyes to blink back to human and peers about warily. Surely he hadn't left him alone and unsupervised? He wouldn't exactly be able to run out the room – not until he dries out at least – but come on, surely he would find some way to escape, the human couldn't have thought of everything. ‘

He bites down on the cloth in his mouth in thought and suddenly realizes his hands are free, there's nothing stopping him from untying the cloth himself. It would be clumsy with his webbing, but he could do it. There's even a window open on the opposite side of the room. He could Siren call...he could enchant the whole crew, he could get one of them to carry him over there maybe? Something - It was worth a try.

This was it, this was his escape – the Captain wasn't as smart as he thought he was.

Steve raises his hands out the water, but then suddenly there is a blur of movement and a metal click and something cold pressed against the skin of his wrists and he realizes in dismay that his hands have been shackled together in tight, metal cuffs. He struggles, tries to raise his arms but his wrists are tight together and he can't quite duck his hands under his arms to reach behind his head.

He hears a chuckle and Billy comes around from where he had been standing behind him. Steve glares at him and earns himself a wink in return.

Steve has always been gentle by nature, not one for fighting, but he could really see himself sinking his talons into that infuriatingly smug face right now.

“You promised to behave,” the human says smugly, looking all too pleased with himself.

Steve sags in the water, sinking down until he's fully submerged. He glares at the Captain through the glass as he waltzes his way over to

the bed and throws himself down on the sheets.

He glares until the candles burn out and the room is doused in moonlight, though it does nothing to obscure his vision. He glares and begs his stupid brain to come up with something, anything.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

It would be so easy.

So why wasn't he doing it? Why wasn't he digging the blade in? Why was he pausing?

His hand seems to move on its own accord. He dips the blade in the bowl of soaped water and rinses the foam and hair from it. He wipes it off on the cloth that hangs around the blond's shoulders, just like he had been taught and readies himself.

He moves his arm around and presses the blade to flesh.

He watches, eyes trained on any movement the Captain makes. He does not tense. He does not flinch. His pulse remains that steady thump against his flesh.

Steve wakes with the dawn.

The swaying of the ship as it glides its way through the ocean waves sets the room rocking and the water lazily sloshing around in his crate, making a mockery of the ocean tide.

He opens his eyes to see the deep blue of the ocean meeting the horizon where the sky cuts through in brilliant shades of orange and yellow, backed with a soft pink that makes the room glow.

He's always loved sunrises - the few of them he has seen in his life. The way the sky can change in the blink of an eye, shifting colours and textures until the sun bursts over the edge of the world and bathes the land sea in life.

He tilts his head up to the surface of his tank and pulls himself up to lean back against the edge, patiently letting his skin dry, his vision clear and the sounds of the boat come back to him. He watches the colours shift beyond the windows of the Captain's cabin, sees how it shifts the glow of the room, illuminating it slowly as the sun begins its peek above the horizon.

With it, the rest of the ship wakes. He can hear the faint padding of feet on deck, the call of gulls in the early morning as they soar overhead, the groan and creak of the old boards of the vessel as the waves tilt it to and fro.

Billy is nearly invisible to him, lying in the bedding, partially hidden by the canopy of curtains draped around him. Steve watches him as he rolls over, back to the window and his brow creased, trying to get away from the sun. He cranes his neck, lifting himself a little more out of the water to get a better look at the human.

In sleep, he's not so imposing and scary. His jaw loses its sharp cut from where he has his teeth grit endlessly, his brow is smoothed out from its usual frown and his lips, either pulled into a devilish grin or tight with anger are parted as he breathes softly. His curls glow like spun gold around his head when the rising sun reaches them, bathing his skin and casting the man as golden as the grains of sand of Steve's home.

Steve didn't think he could find someone beautiful, not human anyway. But he is, even he can't deny it. The way he glows like the sun is soaked into his very blood, the soft slide of smooth skin over sculpted muscle, the feathered soft curl of his hair. So different from everything Steve had even thought a human could be.

Blue eyes flicked open and made Steve's stomach lurch in fright. The blond blinked a little then seemed to quickly find his bearings, those blue depths narrowing in on him, head tilting up from where it had been rested against white sheets.

Steve gives a little wave, channelling as much sarcasm into it as he can muster, clinking his cuffs together and watches the Captain chuckle and push himself to his knees.

The sun now fully risen, he sits with it bathing his back, almost silhouetted against it. Steve could do nothing more than stare, a little dumbfounded, a little awed. Billy scrubs his hands over his face and sighs, kicking off his blankets and standing on steady, well-practiced feet as the boat soars over a larger wave, lanterns and trinkets that hang from the ceiling swaying with it.

The Captain is bare as the day he was born as he saunters over to a pitcher by the door and pours himself a mug of water, taking a long gulp and assessing Steve over the rim. He gestures the flagon to him, asking silently if Steve wants some, he shakes his head. He feels well hydrated, well rested, well everything just from spending some time in sea water again.

Billy nods, finishing his cup and wipes a hand over his mouth as he tosses the mug back onto the surface.

“Sleep well then, Princess?” his voice is teasing and Steve just rolls his eyes at him and the newest addition to his growing list of nicknames.

The Captain flashes him a grin and grabs his trousers from the night before, fishing around in the pockets and retrieving one of those rod things from it. He tosses the trousers aside carelessly and comes over, Steve holding out his cuffed hands eagerly.

“Oi, not yet,” the blond berates him with a smile, “out first, I need you with legs again.”

Steve sags but relents, lets Billy dip his arms into the now lukewarm water and haul him out. Water sloshes and dribbles to the floor but Billy pays it no mind, turning and grunting a little as he settles Steve on a woven rug on the floor at the foot of the bed.

“Gods, you’re heavy with a tail,” he mutters, standing back up and tossing a sheet to Steve to dry off with. The Siren just glowers up at him but does as he is told, patting his skin dry and already feeling the change come over him.

Billy goes to the window and opens a second one, letting cool ocean air breeze in to help the drying process. Steve pats himself down carefully, feeling the tingle as his skin seems to tighten, his legs separating slowly, scales retreating into smooth skin and his tail shrinking into a pair of feet with ten toes. His fingers are weirdly his favorite part, he likes to watch the webbing split and thread into itself, little wrinkles forming, blunt nails growing in place of claws and he stretches his fingers out, spreads them as wide as he can. The ears are the next favorite, its so strange to go from the dull

underwater fuzz to the clear, acute hearing of his human form. Hair is strange too, he doesn't really have any as a Siren – doesn't have much need for it. He has fin like strands that run across his head but as a human he has so much hair, it flops about and gets in his eyes and feels like soft fur.

When he's fully changed he fusses against the rag still tied tight around his mouth. He moves his hands up to take the gag off but stops, looking to Billy for permission.

The Captain sits watching him, a look of awe upon his face. It surprises Steve. For all his knowledge has this human never actually seen a change up close?

Billy notices his paused movements and nods, coming forwards to slide the rod into the hole in his shackles and with a click they are gone. Steve hurriedly undoes the knot and throws the wet fabric to the side. He rubs his hands over the skin around his mouth, the last of the scales there sinking into smooth skin and he opens and shuts his mouth a few times to rid himself of any stiffness.

"Does it hurt?"

He's still rubbing his jaw when he looks over to Billy who is now stood wearing a pair of trousers and a dark colored shirt, open to his navel and showing off his chest. A necklace glints there, something rounded and gold.

"No," he says, finding no harm in being honest with this, "it feels strange, you never really get used to it, but it doesn't hurt."

Billy comes forwards, holding a folded pile of clothes and tosses them into Steve's lap.

"I always wondered about the legs," he continues, seating himself and pulling out his pipe and Steve takes the invitation to dress himself, guessing at where to put what into which hole in each piece of fabric.

"What about the legs?" he asks, shoving his head into the blue fabric and wriggling a little when he doesn't find an exit. He struggles a bit

more, beginning to panic, feeling a little like he's drowning in it when movement outside his cocoon tugs the fabric to the side and suddenly he's out and breathing the air again and staring right into the Captain's face.

"I mean the whole two legs joining together and then splitting apart again, it's weird," he reaches up and fusses with the fabric around Steve's neck, adjusting it to the way it's supposed to sit, "what if you try to fight it? Keep your legs apart in the water, what would happen then?"

Steve would laugh at the question but he's a little distracted by how close the blond is standing to him suddenly. He's never been this close. He can see the hair that dusts around his mouth and jaw and down some of his neck, little golden hairs like the ones atop his head. There is a small dusting of freckles across the bridge of his nose and his left eye has a white, jagged scar running down through his brow, across his lid and then halfway down his cheek. He's never noticed it before.

"I uh," he swallows and Billy seems satisfied with his collar, stepping back and going to where he left his pipe on the table by the seat he was perched in previously. He pulls out a little box of powdered spices or leaves and begins stuffing them into the end of the pipe, giving Steve an expectant look.

"You can't," Steve manages to say, trying to brush away his sudden flustered manner and bends to the darker fabric, picking it up and seeing it's a pair of trousers – simple enough.

"You can't fight it," he continues, sliding his leg into the larger hole and feeling a small moment of triumph when he manages to do it right, "I mean, when the change comes over its – its instinctual," he wobbles when he raises the other foot and misses the hole, getting his big toe caught in the hem and stumbling to the side, landing on the end of the bed.

Billy watches him with great amusement as he lights the pipe, but he's listening to Steve's words, so he tries again to explain.

"I mean, I've never *tried* to fight it, you just don't want to – it's like

breathing, you can try to stop yourself from doing it but sooner or later your instincts take over and will force you to take a breath,” he says, managing to get his foot into the other leg and pulls the fabric all the way up to his waist.

He gives Billy a triumphant look and the blond chuckles, biting the pipe end to keep it in his mouth as he stands and pulls a length of cloth from where it was draped across the back of his chair and comes close again, draping it around Steve’s waist and tying it at the side.

“Yeah, that makes sense,” he says around the pipe, leaning back as he works to keep the burning end out of dangerous territory, “comfortable?”

He steps back, sucking on the pipe again and blows a puff of smoke to the side, eyeing Steve up and down.

“The trousers are a bit short on you, but it’s not a deal breaker,” he says, tugging at the cloth around his waist, “that will hold them up, you’re tall but still skinnier than me” he continues, meeting Steve’s gaze.

Steve shrugs, clothes are pieces of fabric to him, he’ll wear them because his human form gets cold and these humans seem to have value in being clothes, but beyond that, they’re just silly to him.

“I feel fine,” he says, his stomach giving a loud, enthusiastic noise of disagreement.

Billy throws his head back and a bright peal of laughter erupts from him, it surprises Steve and pulls a smile at his own mouth at the sound. Its nothing like the cruel laugh Tommy had, this one is bright like the bubble of foam in the morning surf and the call of morning birds and they soar overhead.

A knock at the door makes him jump and Billy is still chuckling as he calls for whoever is there to enter. The girl from the night before pokes her head in, looking warily at Steve standing there, feeling a little odd in his new garments. The sounds of the crew float in from behind her, shouts here and there and peals of laughter as they go

about their duties.

“Good morning, Heather, good timing too.”

“Good morning, Captain, are you wanting to break fast with the crew or should I bring you in a platter?”

“I think we will eat in here, eh, Stevie?”

Steve shrugs, feeling a little lost, a little alien in his new clothes, a little flustered at this easy, breezy mood the Captain is in and a little like he's lost anchor. He suddenly is very aware that he is unbound and that window is still open on the other side of the room.

“I'll bring you both in some,” Heather says, turning to leave, wary eyes lingering on Steve as he glances again to the window.

“And Heather,” Billy waits for her to turn back to him and his face goes serious for a moment, “let Tommy out, tell Jack to keep an eye on him.”

She nods and closes the door behind her with a soft click.

Steve had forgotten about Tommy. Does that mean he's going to have to deal with him again?

A familiar clink of metal catches his attention and his heart sinks when Billy comes forwards with a new set of cuffs, these ones with a chain hanging between them.

“Now be a good boy, Stevie, or its back to the brig with you.”

Steve takes a step back, glances to that window again but the backs of his knees connect with the end of the bed and he loses his balance, folding back to sit on the mattress and Billy lunges forwards, clinking the cuffs into place around his ankles in one, smooth movement.

He glowers up at Billy as he stands, the chain clinking merrily with his movements. He takes an experimental step and is surprised at the freedom of movement they give him.

“I can still move,” Steve says warily.

Billy tilts his head, smirking, “and if you do run, where would you go, Siren-son?”

He glances to the window again, eyes unable to stop darting from it to Billy.

The blond nods, “and if you did manage to get out, get in the water, the change comes over you. You’ll just swim away from us as fast as your little tail can carry you, yes?”

Steve nods, despite himself, fists curling in the sheets as Billy tongues at his pipe, eyes glittering in mirth and a cruel smile lifting his cheek.

“And how do you think your fins will fare, trying to form over all that metal?”

Steve’s heart sinks into his stomach.

“Interesting what you said about your tail, I wasn’t sure if these would work, but after you told me you can’t fight the change, they should do the trick.”

Billy takes a last drag of the pipe and turns, batting out the now burned contents of the end into a small box on the table and sets the thing down by it. Steve watches him with his heart in his throat. Why did he open his mouth? Why did he think that anything he said wouldn’t get him in trouble? He thought it was harmless telling him that, how could he have known this ruthless man was going to find a way to use anything about his kind against him?

“What do you want with me?”

“Ah, that would be telling, wouldn’t it?”

“If you’re keeping me alive you must mean to sell me.”

The Captain scoffs, “I don’t want to sell you. If I did, you would have been gone at our last port.”

“Then what the hell am I doing here?” he’s shouting now, sick of playing this human’s games of outsmarting him and making him suffer the consequences. What was he still alive for if not to be sold?

Was he just wanting to keep him as some sort of trophy? He was going to a lot of trouble for it, keeping him in shackled, outsmarting any move he makes, always thinking three steps ahead of him. What could it possibly all be for?

Billy gives him an annoyed, impatient look. He opens his mouth to reply but the door swings open again and Heather is back, arms laden with a large platter of food. Steve back up and trips over the chain, stumbling back onto the bed again and remains there, too frustrated to do much else.

Heather sets the platter down on the table closest to them and Robin breezes in behind her with a large jug and two mugs in hand. She gives Steve a friendly smile and he doesn't return it, glowers as the two girls deposit the wares on the table and turn to leave.

Robin bends to say something to Billy quietly and he sees the blond's head nod behind her shoulder before she straightens and leaves them alone again.

The window lets in a breeze at that moment and it ghosts the smell of the food over to Steve and his stomach groans loudly again. He grits his teeth but thankfully Billy makes no comment. Steve watches him, face hardened and jaw tight as he helps himself to the food, selecting some things for his plate and filling the two mugs with the liquid from the jug. It's a dark color, a bright red like the color of the Captain's shirt.

"Eat," the blond says tone firm and Steve wants to be stubborn, wants to protest and fight, but he is so hungry and the food is right there looking heavenly and he chips away some more at his pride when he stands, gingerly stepping over his chain and shuffles forwards, sitting in the seat previously occupied by Billy and tucks in.

He recognizes most of the fruits, some of the vegetables, those round, red things he likes are there so he selects a few of them. There is a few cuts of what looks like chicken which he avoids, stomach churning at the memory of it squashed under Tommy's boot and offered to him.

He pops one of the red things into his mouth and chews eagerly,

feeling it burst and fill his mouth with its juice. He doesn't even try to hide the groan of pleasure, swallowing and helping himself to another, then another.

"You like your tomatoes then, huh?"

Steve refuses to look at him, picking up one of the potatoes Robin had brought him before and biting into it, chewing slowly so as not to choke like he had last time. Tomatoes, so they have a name.

They eat in silence, Billy picking at his food, eating most of the chicken and something he calls ham, not touching the fruit, pushing the bowl over to Steve when he sees him eyeing it hungrily. They eat their fill and Steve takes a sip from the mug of the dark liquid and it bursts in flavor on his tongue, a medley of spices and sweet like nectar and honey.

When his stomach bulges, pushing at his belt and he can eat no more, he sags back in the chair. He feels better after having ate, less tense and jittery and the fire in him dampened somewhat. He watches Billy as he flicks through some papers on his desk, squinting at them a little as he reads the markings on them. Steve doesn't know how to read them, none of the Sirens do, as far as he knows. They don't have any purpose in learning more than the spoken language.

The ship sways and groans and Steve shifts in the quiet, waiting for his stomach to digest his food and wonders what the hell the Captain wants from him now.

Billy sighs after a while, rubbing at his eyes and running a hand over the hairs on his jaw, making a light scratching sound.

"Gods, I need a shave," he mutters, tossing the papers aside and going to a vanity that sits next to Steve's basin. He watches as the blond pours out some water from the flagon there into a bowl and rustles about with some of the bottles and things on the table in front of him. He stills after a while, only moving slightly every so often and Steve sighs.

"What am I supposed to do?"

He hears Billy chuckle, gesturing over his shoulder to come over.

Steve reluctantly complies, walking around Billy to see he's got a knife in hand and he's dragging it across his kin which is covered in white foam. Steve starts a little in fight but relaxes and watches curiously as he sees the smooth skin left behind after the blade passes, no hairs where there previously had been.

"You can finish this."

Steve stares at him, "excuse me?"

"You hold the blade like this, and draw it slowly up," Billy says patiently, voice almost gentle as he takes one of Steve's hands in his own and presses the handle of the blade to his palm, tilting his hand to an angle. He can feel the Captain's eyes on him in the small mirror, forces himself to keep his own gaze upon the task before him and not give the Captain the satisfaction.

He places the edge of the blade at the angle he had been shown against the blond's throat. He pauses, fingers trembling. He can see the small patch of flesh bobbing up and down with his pulse, in a slow rhythm that baffles Steve. He is truly so calm and confident, even with his life literally in Steve's hands.

Steve steels his resolve and grips the handle firmly, before slowly adding pressure and drawing the blade up. It glides through the foamy soap and the small hairs gather on the end as they are sheared away, leaving behind a smooth strip of skin. Steve nearly smiles, despite himself, pleased to have done such a fine job on his first try and meets the Captain's gaze in the vanity.

The face he finds there is unexpected. The Captain still has that hard, tensed look about his jaw, but his eyes are soft, almost gleaming and his mouth curled up so slightly at the corners.

"Good," he says in a voice soft as velvet, and then slips his eyes shut, leaning back in the chair and waits for Steve to continue.

Steve pauses and silence reigns for a moment. He looks at the sight before him; this fierce Pirate King, lounged back and relaxed in the

presence of his enemy – his very *armed* enemy – and thinking nothing of it. Where did he gain this steely, confident resolve? Was he so sure that Steve would not gut him the first opportunity he has? And *what* an opportunity has been presented before him.

Anger at the arrogance rises in Steve and disappears as quickly as the sea meets the sand. Perhaps this is a test. Perhaps this is a trap. What piece of the puzzle has Steve missed? What is the catch?

He could so easily dig the blade into that soft, golden flesh and tear it apart, watch the man choke on his own blood and run. It wouldn't matter if the crew knew, even if he had guards outside the door they wouldn't hear anything until the deed was already done. He could just find that rod that releases his shackles and dive right out of the window and escape into the sea just like that. They would never find him ever again.

It would be so easy.

So why wasn't he doing it? Why wasn't he digging the blade in? Why was he pausing? He could slice his throat, find the key to his shackles and dive out of the window before the crew even hear a thing.

His hand seems to move on its own accord. He dips the blade in the bowl of soaped water and rinses the foam and hair from it. He wipes it off on the cloth that hangs around the blond's shoulders, just like he had been taught and readies himself.

He moves his arm around and presses the blade to flesh.

He watches, eyes trained on any movement the Captain makes. He does not tense. He does not flinch. His pulse remains that steady thump against his flesh.

Steve draw the blade up once more, curving with the angle of the jaw and once more rinses it off and wipes the blade. Again and again, he does this, gently tilting the blond's head this way and that to get the better angle, the Captain all the while sitting with his eyes closed, like his own mother is the one shaving him.

When he is done, Steve drops the blade in the bowl and steps away,

nearly tripping over his shackles.

Billy's eyes open at the sound, and that smirk Steve so hates returns. He winks at Steve through the misted vanity glass and tugs the cloth from his shoulders around to wipe the excess soap from his face. He leans close to examine the job and Steve watches in silence.

"Not a bad job, pretty boy."

Steve is shaking with anger. How could he have been so stupid. Of course the Captain wasn't testing him or god forbid trusting him. The bastard was simply so sure, so confident that he has Steve right where he wants him; shackles and all, that he can't escape. And Steve had proven him right. He is so *stupid*.

V

Steve was permitted on deck after that, something that he was surprised to hear.

Billy keeps a watchful eye on him the entire time.

He shuffles out of the cabin's doors and out into the bright sunlight of the day, squinting up at the clear blue sky. The sun has such heat in it, it makes him want to cringe away and keep to the shadows. The crew bustle around him, some casting him curious looks, some distrustful gazes here and there. His chain clatters as he moves and he hates it, like waving a flag over his head and announcing here he is, here is the creature your Captain is keeping as his personal pet. He finds a cove of shade near the cabin doors and sticks to it, noticing the big man from before hovering by him, pretending to be about his tasks. There are eyes all around watching him, he can feel it like touches on his skin.

With little else to do, he stays put, stays still and out of trouble and watches the humans go about their day. He's never seen a ship before

– not up close. He never really appreciated how much goes on to keep the place running smoothly. Crew go about their tasks without needing to be told, running the ship like a well-oiled machine. They are mostly males, but Steve is surprised to see more females than he first thought. Aside from Robin and the girl Heather, there is two other women; one is an older lady with white streaked hair and a sun wrinkled face who goes back and forth with baskets of grains and disappears to the lower decks for long amounts of time, reappearing with pales of milk and feathers in her hair. They must have livestock on board that she tends to. The other is a younger female with red hair as bright as a flame. She seems to have some authority, barks orders here and there and goes about overseeing most of the tasks. She goes to Billy with scrolls and papers for him to check sometimes, he assesses them closely, squinting down at the paper and nodding to what she says. At one point, Steve is surprised to see her frown and punch his arm but the blond only shoved her back, the two falling into a round of bickering that didn't seem to bother the rest of the crew at all.

As Billy moves about the deck his authority is obvious. Steve had heard of Pirate Captains plenty of times from the Chief, described as these ruthless creatures who didn't care for life, cut down anything and anyone in their path and lead like real kings on the seas. Billy is nothing like he had expected. He leans his hand wherever it is needed, even going as far as slinging off his jacket and hat to climb the mast and help a few men rope in the huge swaths of fabric that made up the sails. He is more hands-on than Steve expected and only takes the wheel a few times when the tasks seemed to dwindle down. Dustin is mostly at the helm, frowning down at his endless supply of notes, consulting his compass, and muttering little equations and sums to himself as he goes.

Steve feels useless and alien there, completely unsure of what he is supposed to be doing. He knows Billy wants him on deck with all these eyes on him so he has no chance to escape, but he is just sitting there useless, watching folk come and go. He tilts his head to the side and looks out to the endless expanse of water surrounding them. His skin itches to return to it, he feels sticky in his human skin. He could hardly remember how it felt to slide into those depths, kick his way down as far as he can and bury himself in the grains of sand way

down at the bottom, the quiet solitude and the sight of the sun wavering through the surface at him. It is the cruelest torture of all, to be so close and yet so impossibly far away from where he so wants to be.

As the day goes on, he doesn't feel any less uneasy. Perhaps that is Billy's underlying motivation; to keep him sitting on the edge of a knife, never to forget that he is at the mercy of these people. Robin, Dustin, even Lucas and the large man – who he learned was named Jack – may have been civil, even kind to him, but Steve would be a fool if he allows himself to think they are anything like friends. He has to keep his guard up, he had already given out what he thought was useless information and it had wound up being the key to Billy's plan for keeping him on a leash.

As the sun begins to dip more and more, the sky changing from its brilliant blue to deeper shades of orange and pink, the activity dwindles down. Food is brought out and they help themselves to it, what looks to be some form of broth in a huge cauldron that the woman who tended the livestock served out to each.

Steve jumps when Lucas seems to appear out of thin air next to him, handing him his own bowl and spoon.

"It's bone broth, Maggie's best," he tells Steve as he gingerly takes the hot bowl from him.

It tastes fine, its hot and burns his tongue, but it has some potatoes floating in it which he happily chews on. He misses his usual food. These pirates don't seem to rely on fishing for their food as he had always assumed. Things are busy on deck at almost every hour, so he doubts they have time to sit and catch fish. Steve would kill just to be allowed in the water for a minute or so to hunt his own food.

The crew settles down as they eat, setting out some barrels and helping themselves to the amber liquid in bottles. A young boy goes about lighting some lanterns as the sun continues its descent and crates are turned over for some to play cards and other games Steve can't put a name to.

Lucas sits at a crate nearby, Dustin, Robin and Heather with him.

They chatter as they eat, Robin laughing loudly at something Dustin says. They don't look at him much, but that didn't make Steve feel any easier, he knows every ear and eye are trained on him secretly.

Steve eats slowly, watching all the goings on with some curiosity.

Billy had been sat at a desk near the middle of the ship, pouring over a map and some papers, frowning down at the lines and markings on them. As the evening deepenes, he abandons his work and Max takes his place as the blond moves to a group of crew gathered around a crate playing with their cards. He is welcomed into the game, one of the males getting up from his seat to let him sit there and dealing him in.

Steve's curiosity gets the better of him and his knees feel stiff from sitting in one place for so long. He stands and shuffles over slowly, his chain clinking obscenely loud on the deck and he does his best to ignore the stares all around as he passes.

The Captain sits lounged in his seat against the side of the ship, one leg bent and resting on his knee and his pipe held to his mouth, his round of decks in his other hand. When Steve arrives at the group, eyes flicked to him, the Captain glanced to him then back to his cards.

"Shall we deal you in, Siren-son?"

Steve notes the nickname, he only really uses it in moments where Steve is of the lower hand. This being of no exception.

"I am more of an observer."

The Captain chuckles, shuffling the cards in hand then deciding on one, picking it out and placing it on the top of the crate with a resounding flick.

"Not one for games, are you?"

Steve bristles at the suggestion, "not one for footing about."

Billy's mouth quirks at one corner, he opens his mouth to retort, but the red headed female suddenly appears at Steve's flank, tossing her

mane over one shoulder.

“Billy, I need to talk to you about the raid.”

The blond seems unbothered by the intrusion, shuffling his cards again as other members of the game set down their plays.

“As my Bosun, I thought I could leave that for you to handle, Maxine.”

The red head glowers at him, shoving aside one of the players and leans on his shoulder with her arm, the man seeming unbothered by the intrusion, peering at his cards.

“It is handled,” she says with an air of annoyance, tossing her hair back, “I just need to know what we’re going to do with him during it” she continues, jutting her chin at Steve, “we will need all able hands. I don’t fancy leaving him on ship alone.”

The air is quiet as the crew watches Billy shuffle his cards before decidedly placing one down, the men opposing him groaning, one selecting a few from a pile in the centre of the surface. Billy chuckles, keen eyes watching the movement, “he will be with me.”

There is a beat of silence, Steve following the gaze of the crew as he glances from Billy to Max. Anticipating the next words.

“You will be responsible for him,” she says at last, casting a glare to Steve then directing it to the blond.

Billy smirks, looking to her over his deck, “Stevie will do as he is told.”

A growl builds in his throat at this Pirate’s ignorant confidence.

“Maxie Maxie Maxie, don’t you know the Cap’s got his little pet trained by now? Even lets the runt roam free.”

Steve turns to the voice and his blood runs cold when he sees Tommy strolling over to where the group is gathered. He grins through his yellowed teeth and the red head glares up at him.

“Fuck of, Tommy, you’ve caused enough trouble already, and I told you not to call me that.”

Tommy brushes off her words, looking to Steve with that look of disdain that seems permanently etched on his face, then to the Captain who hasn’t moved, hasn’t reacted at all, sits with his eyes to his cards.

“He’s even got the thing in his cabin with him, I’d wager he even lets it share his bed.”

“Can it, Hagan,” one of the men says, a few murmurs of annoyance here and there as the human barrels on.

“What? Any man here is going to tell me they haven’t thought it?”

“You’re going to earn yourself another night in the brig if you don’t shut your mouth,” Max hisses at him, cheeks red as her hair.

Tommy barks a harsh laugh, “I’m just saying what everyone else here is afraid to say. We caught the Siren to line our pockets with pretty, gold coins, and our so called Captain has got the fishstick warming his cock. ‘Black Eye’ Billy’s gone soft on us—”

Billy made no reaction to the words, but every one of the crew surrounding him did.

Curses and hisses of disgust rang out and every crew member got to their feet, blades drawn. Tommy stiffened, face paling and eyes widening as a circle of blades surrounded him, all pointed to his throat.

“You got some balls on you if you think you can talk about your Captain like that, Hagan,” the man Max had been leaning against hissed, towering over Tommy who remains frozen in fright.

The Captain sighs, tossing his cards on to the crate that was had been up turned in the commotion. His face remains stoic, as he slowly rises to his feet, stepping forwards, blades moving out the way to accommodate him, still raised at the ready as he steps up to Tommy. Steve watches with wide eyes as he tilts his head to the side to speak lowly and directly to him.

"I will thank you not to make such comments on my ship, Mr Hagan.

The man remains silent, breathing through flared nostril, eyes wide and on Billy. He steps closer, voice low like before and the entire ship waits with bated breath for his next words.

"What are my rules, Tommy?"

The man's jaw flexes, looking down at the Captain with stubborn resolution. Steve sees a few men cast glances to one another, sharing looks of annoyance, anger, even some fear. When it seems apparent that the man isn't going to answer, Billy sighs, steps back and raises his chin.

"What are my rules?" he asks in a loud, commanding voice. Tommy still doesn't answer, but then the voices of the rest of the crew sound, every one of them looking to their Captain as they speak as one.

"Every man shall obey his commander in all respects."

Tommy glances about with worry in his eyes, the men holding him grip him tighter as he tries to wriggle free.

"Each man is to have an equal share in any treasure seized."

Billy stays still, eyes watching Tommy struggle as the crew recite the rules, Steve looks about in wonderment at it all, sees that Dustin and Robin and the rest have stepped up from their place to join, every crew member gathered around the sight.

"Any person who deserts or refuses to serve aboard must be punished."

The boat sways lazily on the dark water, the night quiet, like the very world waits to see the outcome of this.

"Every man shall have an equal vote in affairs of the moment."

Billy opens his mouth and joins in on the last one, *"he that breaks the rules shall be punished by death or marooning."*

Billy picks up his hat from where it was resting beside him at the game, sets it on top of his curls and squares his shoulders, plants his

feet.

“An equal vote. What will it be, lads? Death or marooning?”

Max steps up beside him, “those in favor of death, raise hands.”

Hands go up all around, hers included. Tommy whimpers as he looks about, not everyone, but quite a few of the crew vote for it.

“B-Billy, please.”

“Those in favor of marooning.”

Dustin raises his hand, Lucas and Robin following. Those that did not put their hands up for the first vote do so now. It looks to be an even count to Steve, Max’s head bobs as she counts the hands in the air. Billy remains standing with his eyes fixed on Tommy.

“Even count,” she says when she is finished, her tone disappointed.

“We have one still to vote.”

Steve frowns in confusion then his heart leaps into his throat when Billy turns and suddenly all eyes are on him.

“He-he doesn’t count!” Tommy shouts.

“It is for the Captain to decide who is part of the crew,” Lucas says.

Billy looks at him, gaze fierce. Steve hasn’t seen him like this before. He wondered, a few times, why this man would be called Captain. Aside from the nickname ‘Black Eye’ Bill, he’s not given Steve any reason to view him as ferocious like he was supposed to. The man was cunning and cruel, yes, but he wasn’t so fearsome other than that. But now, in this moment, watching the power he commands and the fire in his gaze, Steve trembles a little in fear.

“Death or marooning?”

His voice is level, calm even, but still those eyes burn on him. Steve flounders, overwhelmed by the sudden decision that is set on his shoulders. How was he to decide this? Tommy was not a good man,

but Steve did not think he could condemn him to death. He couldn't live with that weight on his conscience, knowing that his decision had robbed him of his life.

But still, the crew await an answer, a very angry, loyal crew that were seeking out their justice. They wouldn't take kindly to Steve disobeying their rules, rules they seemed to take like law. He may not be part of them, may not be a pirate, but the decision was his. He looks to Tommy, even now, even while Steve holds his life in his hands, the man looked at him with such seething hatred. Steve allows his own look of disgust to cross his features and feels a small spark of satisfaction at the glimmer of regret he sees passing across the man's face.

"Marooning," he says at last, looking back to Billy, "I vote marooning."

Billy's mouth quirks at one corner and his head tilts to the side, softening his gaze on Steve, "so be it."

Movement erupts all around, some sheath their swords in favor of holding Tommy, rope tied around him and he is moved away, back to the brig to await his punishment. He shouts and struggles all the way, screaming out profanities and spitting at Steve. The sound of him fades the further below deck he goes until Steve can't hear him anymore.

"Are you okay?" Steve turns to see Dustin looking up at him in worry.

He doesn't quite know how to reply. He feels dizzy and sick. The entire interaction rushes through his mind, playing over and over again and he takes in a sharp breath to calm his racing heart.

One part sticks in his mind.

The crew go back to their games, a small group pick up instruments and begin playing some music off to one side. Drink is poured, laughter and jokes shared, everything falling back into normal as if Tommy had never even existed.

Steve wobbles on his feet. He wants to get off this cursed boat. He wants to go back to his home, to his people, his peaceful, quiet people. Back to where marooning and murder are not considered, where they help each other out and are kind and don't plan raids and gamble and lock up prisoners.

He stumbles his way back to the cabin, needing to get away from all those eyes. He's not even sure he's allowed back in here, perhaps the brig is where he is supposed to go after this. He doesn't care, right now, he just needs to be alone to calm his racing body and be still for a moment.

He bursts through the doors with his chain clanking against the floors. He stumbles to the bed and grips on to one of the corner posts, pressing his cheek against the smooth wood and focuses on catching his breath.

"You did well."

He turns to see Billy close the door behind him, face somber as he peels off his coat and sets it down on the desk with his hat.

"Are you okay?" he looks and sounds genuinely concerned, but Steve's got Tommy's voice ringing in his mind and he backs away when the blond tries to come closer.

"You said you didn't want to sell me."

Billy looks surprised for a moment, then schools his expression, looking at Steve warily, "I did."

"Then why the hell does Tommy think you caught me to get rich off me?"

He watches the human flex his jaw.

"Tommy lies-"

"- No, no I am done playing these games," Steve hisses, facing Billy square on, "tell me what you want with me. I need to know. What is it you want?"

Billy studies him for a long moment. Eventually he sighs, looks down, then blue eyes flick up to him, watching him through thick lashes.

“I want your scales.”

That wasn't what Steve expected. Not even close.

“What?”

Billy raises a hand to the necklace hanging around his neck, picks up the gold medallion and turns it for Steve to see. He realises it's not a medallion at all. It's a scale, gold and glinting brighter than any coin. His stomach feels like it drops out of his body at the sight.

“I want to sell your scales. Just one could buy me a whole new ship. The entire tail could set me and my crew to live the rest of our lives like royalty.”

Steve shakes his head, backing away, “b-but we don't shed our scales.”

Billy's jaw flexes, “I know.”

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

The air is heavy with something dangerous and they chew in silence for a while. Steve devours his food. He takes another sip of his wine and looks over to Billy who plays with the meat on his plate in thought.

“You don’t hate me, if you did you wouldn’t have saved me.”

Steve’s heart leaps a little in his chest, “I saved you only because you are my only protection here. With you gone, this crew can do what they like with me.”

The Captain’s jaw tenses and his eyes are wide and darting about Steve’s face, but then they soften, his jaw releases its tension and he sits back in his seat.

“Smart little Siren.”

Notes for the Chapter:

WARNING: graphic depictions of violence and character death

I have used a lot of research in writing this fic, looking into pirates and what life was really like for them - the rules and way of life, especially in regards to sexuality. If anyone would like to see my sources I will be happy to share, it has been very fun learning! Thank you to everyone following this story and taking the time to comment and leave kudos, it is greatly appreciated and I love hearing your thoughts. I am really enjoying writing this and I have so much more to come!

Steve had spent the night on the floor.

He had expected Billy to throw him back into the brig, but the blond had other plans. A chain had been installed in the cabin, one end protruding from a strong, iron hoop fixed into the ship’s wall, a chain

connecting it to one of the cuffs around Steve's ankles. The chain is short, only allows him a meter or so of movement, enough to let him sleep reasonably comfortable. Billy had splayed some pillows and blankets on the floor and Steve had silently took his place, decidedly ignoring the blond and turning his back on him to sleep.

Sleep was not something that came easily to him. He had lay, facing the cabin wall, staring at the old wood and picturing the sea just beyond it, the endless expanse of crisp, blue water that he would sell his soul to return to.

After he had confronted Billy about his plans for him, the blond had refused to elaborate further. He had dismissed any more questions Steve had and when the Siren refused to relent, a blade had been pressed to his throat.

His stomach had churned in anxiety the whole night. So Billy wanted his scales, these humans seemed to value them as some expensive luxury that they could make their fortunes off. It was true what he had said – they *don't* shed their scales. They are armor thick and as much as part of him as his very skin. He doesn't want to think too deeply about just how Billy plans to harvest them.

He keeps thinking about the one he wore around his neck. Where he had gotten it. Had it been from a past catch? Had he injured one of his kind and took that as his prize? Had he purchased it some time ago and kept it as some reminder for his plans? Steve had no way of knowing, he didn't want to ask, he didn't even want to look at Billy at all. He hated that he was forced to breathe the same air as him in that little cabin. But, it was that or the brig, Billy wanted him protected – heavens forbid his goods should get damaged or escape. He would have marched himself into the brig on his own if only Tommy wasn't already down there.

So, the floor it was.

When the morning comes, Steve is woken by the sound of Billy moving around, dressed and ready for the day. He had finally drifted off near dawn and feels like death when he sits up and scrubs at his eyes. Billy is quiet too, unclips him from his chain in the wall and leaves him with the one connecting his legs. He feels the blond's eyes

on him all the while, but Steve keeps his own on the blankets beneath him. Billy's hands touch him only as necessary, brushing his ankle slightly when he slips the rod – or key, as he had come to learn – into the hole and turns it. The metallic click sounds out and Billy pulls the heavy chain away and settles it in a pile by the wall. Steve watches to see where he puts that key, but Billy shifts to check the chain around his ankles, making sure it is good and tight and not in danger of releasing him any time soon.

Steve shivers when his skin brushes his slightly at the movement. The man radiates heat and he smells like the ocean and the air and his pipe smoke and the sweet soaps he uses. Steve hates it. He hates the way the smell of him is almost pleasant and makes him think of calm waters after a storm. This man should smell like dirt and blood and all that reflects him and his cruelty.

He refuses the offer of food already set on the table and leaves the room, wanting to find some place on deck where he will be left alone to brood and find some way to get off this cursed boat.

The crew seems to sense his mood, even Dustin and Robin leave him alone, casting him wary looks as he passes silently. He finds a place near the stern where a man sits mending some barrels and watches the ocean go by. The cuffs around his ankles feel like heavy weights as he pictures over and over diving into the water and the pain he would feel with his tail trying to form around them.

Around midday, a call comes out from above for land and he turns to see a small island coming up upon the horizon. Billy at the wheel turns the thing with steady hands and watches as it comes closer and closer to them. When they are far enough to it, he calls for anchor to drop and the crew make ready for Tommy's departure.

The sun is bright but it dips and hides behind the huge army of clouds wandering across the sky.

The crew stand around on the deck, Steve moves from his place against the wall to stand with Dustin and Robin off to the side. The air is quiet as they watch Tommy getting led u from the brig, squinting in the morning sun.

A wooden plank is secured across heavy crates, protruding off the edge of the ship, casting a long shadow across the glittering water below. The island is tiny and looks abandoned, boasting no more than a few trees and shrubbery. From what Steve understands, Tommy will be left there to die or miraculously find his way out. Either way, the man has forfeited his right to board this ship as crew again.

Tommy looks disheveled, his clothes stained and torn, his hair messier than ever from presumably raking his hands through it. He has rope tied around his wrists and two crewmen hold him by his arms on either side. He is lead up to where Billy waits by the plank, wearing his coat and hat, hand on the hilt of his sword where it is sheathed at his side.

Tommy is stopped in front of him and he glares at Billy but thankfully remains silent.

“Mr Hagan,” Billy says in a steady voice, “you have broken the rules of my ship and a crew vote has determined you are to be cast out by the plank. You will be provided with water,” Billy tucks a small water flask into the belt Tommy wears, “and a pistol with one shot.”

He holds the pistol up in front of Tommy then tucks that too into his belt. The man stays silent, eyes on Billy, jaw tight, fists clenched in front of him.

“Off with him,” Billy says then turns, moving aside while the men holding Tommy loosen his bonds and turn him to the plank. Billy catches Steve’s eye momentarily as he moves. The Siren sets his jaw and turns away.

He turns back again only when he is sure Billy has returned his gaze to Tommy and he watches as Tommy shuffles his way across the wooden board. He bows his head to the water, his hands in front of him rubbing at his wrists.

“This isn’t over,” he can be heard to say. He shuffles with his hands again and turns, Steve realizes a second too late that he has pulled the pistol out of his belt and raised it, aiming it at Billy’s chest.

A shot rings out and there is movement all around, Steve is shoved to the side and he trips over his chain and goes sprawling across the deck. There is a loud splash of water, men shout all around him, a woman screams, boots thud on the deck as folk run here and there and someone grabs Steve's shoulder hauling him to his feet.

He looks up to see Jack there, Robin by his side and she looks livid as she grabs onto his shirt, helping him balance on his feet.

Steve looks to the plank and sees it empty, he looks about in a panic until through the heads all around he sees a mop of shining, golden curls.

Billy is crouched over a crewman who lies on the floor, his shoulder bloody and he grunts in pain.

"Damn you to the depths you son of a bitch!" Dustin yells over the side of the ship and Steve leans over to see Tommy in the water, swimming as fast as he can in the direction of the island. He turns back as the man with the bloody shoulder is helped to his feet.

He must have jumped in front of the shot, getting hit in the shoulder for his trouble.

"Glad to be rid of that bastard," Robin says with heat in her voice, glaring over the side to where Tommy is still swimming.

"At least we are rid of him," Heather says, looping her hand into Robin's arm, her body shaking, "that shot scared the bloody life out of me."

"He's used his shot, the scum can rot on that island," another crewman says as they watch the injured man get hurried into the Captains cabin. Billy has his hand on the wound, keeping pressure on it. Murmuring to the man as they pass. Lucas goes with them.

"Are you okay?" Robin asks, laying a hand on his shoulder.

Steve shrugs her off, "I'm fine, I'm not damaged."

A look of hurt passes her features before she sobers it, looking rightfully guilty at Steve's words.

He shakes his head and turns away, watching Tommy's figure get smaller and smaller as he nears the island.

What cruel irony that this enemy should get the freedom Steve craves.

V

The man is going to be fine, they are informed later when sitting on deck for dinner. Lucas comes out with a blood stained shirt. He only got hit in the shoulder, after a few weeks rest he should be fine.

Steve feels shaken after the events of the morning. The rest of the crew seem to feel the impact of it too. Most are quiet, some murmuring among themselves as they go about their tasks. Robin and Heather sit mending a net near him. Heather had been the one to scream when the shot rang out, apparently she had been standing next to Billy at the time and had only escaped injury because of the man throwing himself before the shot and pushing her to the side. Robin keeps close to her all day. Heather had taken a while to calm, her hands kept shaking and she looked pale. Steve had watched, surprised when they had sat to the side, Robin taking her hands and kissing her once, gently. Heather seemed to perk up a little after that and Robin stayed with her through her tasks.

Max had been livid, storming about the deck, calling Tommy every name under the sun. The island was just dipping beyond the horizon as they continue their course. Eventually, she had stormed her way into Billy's cabin and things had settled down after that.

Some time later, the injured man comes out, pale and bandaged up but he grins when the crew greet him with cheers and applause. Billy grins by his side, a hand on his back. Steve turns back to his meal, the man settling down among his peers, music playing up from somewhere, a barrel of rum rolled out and him given the first mug to

drink.

“No one ever said life aboard a pirate’s ship would be boring.”

Billy straddles the chair before Steve, picking up his own plate of food and shoveling it into his mouth.

“I wouldn’t know, my kind don’t spend much breath talking of such things.”

Billy chuckles and Steve wants to bat the bowl of food right out of his hand. He settles for taking a drink of his water instead.

“Your kind are missing out on some very entertaining stories.”

“We have our own.”

Billy shrugs, still smirking and shovels more food into his mouth.

“We’re making port tonight. Going on a raid,” he says, taking a long drink from his cup, wiping his mouth and belching. Steve doesn’t try to hide the look of disgust on his face.

He scoffs, settling down his fork and leaning back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest, “when should I be getting myself ready?”

Billy shakes his head, “you won’t be doing anything, you’ll be tied up.”

“You’re going to a lot of trouble to keep me on a leash. Why not just hang me up by my tail and pull my scales out one by one already? Why don’t you just save yourself the time and cut it right off me?”

“Steve -”

“Well? What else am I to think? You catch your bait and now you gut it. What else would you be planning on doing? What’s the point of a raid when you have a treasure sitting right before you?”

“We are raiding for food and supplies, not treasure.”

Steve stews in silence, head tumbling over the entire thing. There is something missing. Some reason Billy hasn't just done the deed already. Why is he leading his men on a raid when he had a pot of gold sitting shackled right before him.

"Tommy said..."

He bites his lip, not sure if he should air this question, not sure what he might set into motion with it. Billy looks at him over the rim of his mug, waiting for him to finish and Steve sighs, deciding just to bit the bullet.

"He thought you were keeping me for...for..."

Gods, why can't he just say it? Why was he squirming and suddenly shy under the deep gaze of the pirate?

"For what? For sex?"

Steve cringes at the very human phrasing.

"Mating."

Billy's mouth quirks at the corner and he bites his lip.

"Don't make fun of me," Steve glowers.

Billy fails miserably at trying not to laugh, letting out a peal of it that irks Steve.

"What, your kind don't partake in that pleasure?"

Steve feels his cheeks flame, "no. We have sex – we just -" he cuts himself off, wriggling under Billy's steady gaze.

"For us, a mate is for life."

Billy seems to sober at Steve's words. A shadow of something passes behind his eyes and he looks down.

"It's a little different for us," he says at last. He pauses, seeming to choose his words carefully.

"Humans - normal society humans, can have more than one partner. If you are of higher class, usually you marry and have one lover for your life. Sometimes if that lover dies you might take another. Take my Father, for instance. He married Max's mother, a widow, and she had already bore Max from a previous marriage."

"So...Max is your sister?" he asks, shocked, suddenly all the bickering and arm punching he has witnessed since being captured making more sense.

Billy chuckles, nodding, "not by blood, but yes. The point is, some can have more than one wife or husband in a lifetime. Lower class don't tend to follow such strict rules. A man can walk into a brother and pick any woman – or man he likes."

Steve frowns, mulling over the information. Billy holds out his mug for a refill as a crewman passes with a jug and turns back when his drink is replenished.

"Is that something foreign to you too?"

Steve shakes his head, "no, we love who we love. It doesn't matter who they are. But they are your mate for life. You don't just choose another. We are bonded with them, that bond doesn't break, not even with death."

Billy looks at him for a time, face unreadable.

"You probably find it foolish –"

"- I don't," the blond says, then shrugs, "To love someone that much that you can't even think of being with anyone other than them, it sounds nice. I didn't even know there were male Sirens. You never hear of males, it's always big breasted women with long hair and fish tails. We assumed you mate with human males and reproduce that way. All the stories are of Siren women seducing men with their songs and then killing them."

Steve rolls his eyes, he's heard the stories, each more ridiculous than the next. Humans were such superstitious creatures, happy to believe any tale they hear.

“So you, have you got someone you are bonded with?”

He toys with the remaining food in his bowl, thinking of Nancy’s smiling face, “no.”

Billy takes another drink, Steve glances up at him, curiosity getting the better of him.

“I am guessing you haven’t got a wife hidden away somewhere?”

The blond laughs, eyes crinkling at the corners, “no, not a wife. I was nearly married, it didn’t work out. Women are not much to my taste.”

“So what Tommy said...”

“I prefer my own sex,” he confirms, then shrugs, “I have lain with women, but I prefer men.”

Steve looked about at the people surrounding them, some sitting in pairs, some in groups, some dancing to the music, some playing cards or other games, “and your crew?”

“They don’t care, normal people – people of society, they frown upon it. That’s one of the things that drew me to the pirate life – no one really cares who you lie with. In the navy, you get caught lying with a man and you face a lashing, sometimes even hanging.”

Steve frowns, “that hardly seems fair.”

Billy nods somberly, “people like me, people like us,” he says, gesturing to his crew, “we don’t fit in to what the rest of the world wants. It’s not a life to live, pretending to be something you’re not to please the rules of society. So, we don’t, we live the life we want, do as we please, love who we love, and we’re free.”

It all sounds perfectly understandable when it is put like that.

“Free, but not satisfied.”

Billy swallows the last of his food and sits back in his chair, eyes narrowing at Steve across the way, “what do you mean?”

“You say you have everything you want, but you hunt my kind for money. It seems fickle. Why do you want to be rich when you have the world at your feet?”

Billy looks to be mulling his words over for a moment. He looks out to the setting sun, Steve studying his profile. An ocean breeze toys with his curls, little golden tendrils swaying in the wind.

“You can’t steal everything,” he says at last, voice quiet.

Steve shakes his head, “what could you possibly want that you need so much money for?”

Billy looks back to him and Steve is surprised to see the vulnerability in his eyes. There is something there, some old shadow that he can’t name, something that is hidden deep down. He leans closer, wanting to know more, wanting to finally get let in on this something, this secret that this human has buried deep. He knows whatever it is is the key to every question he has had since he first landed on the ship’s deck.

He watches Billy’s eyes drop to his mouth, linger there, the way Billy seems to look younger than he really is, tired, even sad.

A call from above breaks the spell and makes Steve jump. Billy clears his throat, looks out to the sea beyond Steve and stands, “a story for another time, perhaps. We’re making port.”

Steve turns to see an island looming closer. Its large, mostly thick trees and forest, but there is a small collection of lights near the shore – a harbor town.

Billy reappears and grabs on to Steve’s wrist, “come on, you’re staying here.”

“I thought you said I was coming with you.”

“You were, until Charlie got shot, I’m not risking you getting hurt and I need my wits about me. I can’t have you slowing us down.”

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” he drawls, letting Billy lead him into the cabin room and anchor him back onto the chain there.

“I’m leaving crew stationed on the ship, no trying anything,” Billy warns as he fiddles with the chains, “we won’t take long, I might even bring you back a gift if you are good.”

He straightens and smirks down at Steve who rolls his eyes, “my freedom would be nice.”

Billy shakes his head, grinning, “nah, too predictable.”

He chuckles and walks out the room, leaving Steve to find a spot on the floor and wait for his return, mulling over that look in Billy’s eyes.

V

Steve opens his eyes to see its still dark.

He blinks, confused. How long had he slept? Surely he didn’t sleep through the raid? He must have if it is dark already.

Being out of the water for so long really did a number on him. He was slower to recover, needed more sleep, his body slowing when it didn’t get the replenishment it needs. He must have managed to sleep through the crew’s return and Billy coming to bed, if he even made it to bed. He raises his head to see if he can make out Billy’s shape among the sheets. The room is too dark and his eyes are slower than normal to adjust. He frowns and blinks, trying to clear the lingering sleepy blariness. The moon comes out of a cloud and silver light lightens the room just enough for him to see and his heart leaps into his throat.

A shadow looms in the middle of the room. There is someone in there with them, they are crouched and creeping towards the bed. They pass the window and a beam of moonlight glints on the blade of a knife in their hand.

Steve leaps to his feet, his chain clinking loudly as does. The figure whips around to face him and he gasps when he recognizes the face.

“Thought he would have gutted you by now,” Tommy hisses at him.

How is he here? How did he get off that island? How did this bastard keep coming back to torment him? Tommy takes a step towards him but stops when his eyes catch the chain, pulled taught. He grins when he sees Steve is chained and won't be able to reach him.

“Stay out of this, dog, this doesn't concern you,” he says in a hiss, turning to the bed, knife raised.

“Billy!”

Tommy growls and turns, swiping his knife out at Steve in an attempt to frighten him into silence. Steve opens his mouth and hisses and Tommy's eyes widened and backs up a bit. Steve glowers at him and he realises then his fangs have come out, his claws curling out of his fingers and a haze descends over his mind that says there is danger and he needs to fight it.

Movement in the bed has Tommy turning his head and a blond head pops up from under one of the pillows, “Steve...” he mumbles sleepily, “stop making noise.”

Steve would throw something at him if he could.

“Billy, Goddammit, get up!”

Billy turns and Tommy draws the dagger down. Billy's eyes catch the movement in time and suddenly he's wide awake, rolling as Tommy brings the dagger down, sinking it into the mattress. Billy rolls off the other side of the bed and gets to his feet. He's just wearing his shirt, very unarmed.

“How the fuck did you get back here?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know -” Tommy hisses, lunging at Billy who dodges the blade, turning his body and hitting Tommy over the back of the head. Tommy grunts and stumbles, but gets back to his feet and turns, crouching low in the dark, eyes wide and wild on Billy. The blond stands in front of Steve, shielding him with his body.

“Steve, you hurt?”

“No, let me lose I can help.”

Tommy lunges again and slashes his blade wildly, Billy dodges again but not fast enough and shouts out when the blade slices into his arm. The blond grits his teeth and clenches his fist, swinging his arm and punching Tommy hard in the face. The spiky haired man grunts falling backwards into a cabinet by the door and Billy follows him. Tommy lashes again and Billy grabs him by the wrist, holding the blade away from his face and squeezing to try and get him to drop the weapon. Tommy throws his head forwards, smashing his forehead into Billy’s nose and the blond goes down, blood pouring from his face.

Tommy straddles him and Billy tries to see through the blood, hands lashing out to catch Tommy’s wrist again but the man has the advantage. He wraps a hand around Billy’s throat and raises the blade with the other hand.

He’s forgotten about Steve and hasn’t realized how close he got to him. Steve’s chain pulls taught, but he’s got just enough freedom to jump on Tommy’s back and sink his fangs into his neck.

Tommy screams and Steve bites down as hard as he can then rips his head back, blood spraying out as Tommy’s neck slices open. He falls to the side and Steve goes with him, his chain pulling as far as it can go and tugging his foot out from under him. He hits the floor with a grunt and watches as Tommy holds his throat, blood seeping through his fingers eyes wide and skin going pale as the life drains from him.

Steve hisses, eyes a haze of red and his heart thundering in his chest. Movement catches his eye and he looks to see Billy sitting up, blood dripping down his chin to his chest, one hand raised to Steve in peace.

“Steve, Steve, you good?”

Steve pants, blood in his mouth, dripping down his face. He looks from Billy to the now dead Tommy and his mind clears slowly, realizing the danger is gone, his instincts filing themselves back into the shadows.

The door flies open and crew pile in.

“By the Gods -”

“What happened?”

“Is the Captain hurt?”

“Tommy?!”

Billy is helped to his feet, he brushes off Dustin’s hands as he tried to tend to his nose and keeps his eyes on Steve.

“Get this scum out of here,” he says gesturing to Tommy’s limp body, “and I want whoever was on watch tonight on deck.”

The crew hurry to obey his orders, Tommy getting lifted and dragged out the room. Steve remains where he is, watching the goings on, body still wound tight like a coiled spring. He watches Billy when the room empties, eyes trained on his every move.

“Hey, its okay,” the blond says in soothing tones, hands up, palms to him, “it’s all done with now, Stevie.”

Steve pants but calms. He watches as Billy kneels before him, blue eyes looking him over, “are you hurt?”

Steve shakes his head, coming back to himself slowly.

“No, no I’m...I’m okay.”

“You saved my life.”

He scoffs, “someone had to, you sleep like the dead.”

Billy breathes a little relieved laugh, eyes still wandering over Steve

worriedly, “do you need anything?”

Steve wipes his mouth, “just need cleaned up.”

“I’ll get someone to bring you water,” he says, straightening and grabbing a pair of trousers, slipping them on and using his shirt to wipe at his nose gently.

“I need to deal with the idiots who let that fucker get on board in the first place.”

With that, he strides out the room, the door banging behind him in his wake.

Steve sits on the floor, ears trained on the activity beyond the doors. He hears some muffled shouts, presumably Billy and some footsteps moving about. The voices are muffled to him and he can’t tell what they say so he gives up.

His eyes wander to the blood on the floor, some of it Billy’s, most of it Tommy’s. He tastes it in his mouth. Its not like when he hunts, sinking his teeth into his prey in the water, tasting the flesh of his dinner as it wriggles then stills in his mouth.

The door opens and Heather hurries in, stepping around the pool of blood and kneeling before him. She has a small basin of water with her, Steve can smell the salt of it and sighs in relieve when she confirms its seawater.

She takes a rag and dips it in, pausing for his permission before wiping over his face.

He closes his eyes and hears her gasp, presumably at the sight of his scales forming where she wets his skin. She’s seen it before, but it must be strange to see it up close. He stays still while she cleans him up, his skin relishing in the water’s touch. When she’s done, he’s feeling miles better, more back to himself.

“Are you okay? That must have been scary,” she asks gently when he opens his eyes again.

“I’m a sea creature,” he reminds her gently, “I hunt, I have fangs and

claws, I'm more animal than I am human. This isn't anything new to me."

"You've killed before?"

Steve stills a little then. He hadn't really thought of it like that. In his haze, he had thought nothing more than he is the predator, and Tommy was his prey. He hadn't fully considered that he was a human, a life that he had snubbed out. Before, when Billy had laid the choice to let Tommy live or die in his hands, he had been conflicted. He's gentle at nature, Chief had wanted him to join the warriors of the clan, but Steve had no interest in it.

"No, not a person."

Heather shuffles around, sidles up next to him and rests her head on his shoulder. He freezes, confused, she takes one of his hands in hers and begins to wipe the blood away from his fingers.

"You were defending the Captain, if it wasn't for you, Tommy could have killed you both."

Steve relaxes

a little at her words. It is true, Tommy had come back for revenge and he wouldn't have rested without it. Steve had spared him his life one and Tommy had spurned it. He shouldn't feel bad for someone filled with that much hatred.

"How did he get back here?" he asks, to which Heather shrugs.

"The island we left him on is on a trading route. He could have got lucky and jumped ship with a trading vessel and caught up to us. The men on watch were drunk, everyone was celebrating the raid, he knew to pick his time."

Heather cleans him up until there isn't a spot of blood left on him. She fishes around in Billy's drawers and finds him a change of clothes to wear. She offers him food, but he declines, the taste of Tommy's blood still lingering in his mouth and making his stomach turn. She leaves him when he tells her he just wants to rest for a bit.

When he wakes again, its light, but dimming. He must have slept the day away. A blanket has been thrown over him and the room has been tidied up. The floor has been scrubbed clean of blood and no trace of what happened lingers there.

He rubs at his eyes and looks about, finding Billy at the larger of the tables in front of the window, his back to Steve as he shuffles about things on the surface.

He sits up and yawns, the blanket falling from his shoulders. Billy turns at the noise, his nose looking better, a bit bruised and a small bandage over the bridge of it, one wrapped around his arm too.

“You’re awake, I was beginning to worry you had gone into hibernation.”

Steve chuckles, despite himself and pushes his way to his feet, “the more I’m out the water, the weaker I get, I need more rest.”

Billy come forwards, unlinking him from the wall chain and waits for Steve to find his balance with the chain connecting his ankles. He follows Billy over to the table and is shocked to see it laden with a feast. Foods of every color and shape lie in silver platters over the surface. There is a big flagon of dark colored liquid, even candles on tall, silver holders glinting at him from the center. Two places have been set out on either end.

“What’s all this?”

Billy pulls out one of the chairs and look at Steve expectantly, “dinner.”

“What?”

The Captain shrugs and nods for Steve to sit in the seat he pulled out, “I wanted to thank you for saving my life.”

Steve narrows his eyes at him in suspicion, but does as he is bid, Billy tucking the seat in behind his legs as he lowers himself into it. He watches as Billy goes around to his own set and takes his seat, laying his napkin over his lap with a flourish.

“Eat up, the raid was bountiful, we got lots of good stuff and I made sure to get you a present.”

He juts his chin at the side of the table near Steve and the Siren's eyes widen when he sees the platter of freshly caught, skinned, deliciously raw fillets of fish sitting there invitingly. There is even some tomatoes and the fruits he likes sitting next to it and Steve salivates a little at the sight.

“Thank you,” he says, a little stunned.

Billy smiles, leaning over to fill Steve's glass with the dark liquid, “I'm glad you approve.”

Steve takes a sip of the liquid and it tastes rich and spiced but sweet too with honey. It burns as it goes down but it warms his belly like a fire in the snow and he takes another sip eagerly.

“Better to go easy with that,” Billy says through a mouthful of food, “its wine, I don't know if you lot have it but it will get you drunk if you don't slow it down.”

Steve rolls his eyes, “we have wine, we're not completely cut off from the world. We don't just eat what we hunt, we sometimes trade with humans.”

Billy raises his brows at him, “you do?”

“In human form, of course, they don't know any better.”

Billy chuckles, his teeth making a sharp noise against the metal of his fork as he eats.

“Would you tell me more about your kind?”

“Why?” Steve asks coldly, picking a tomato off its vine, “to make it easier for you to kidnap more of us?”

“Stevie, we're having a nice evening. Besides, if I don't ask you more about you and your kind Dustin will start a mutiny against me, I've kept him at bay long enough, he's desperate to bombard you with questions.”

That makes Steve chuckle as he pops the tomato into his mouth, “I was wondering why he had suddenly stopped taking notes of everything I said. Did he tell you to get me these?” he asks, gesturing to the fish he has in hand.

Billy grimaces a little at the sight, “yes, I guess I should have realized that was how your kind ate.”

“Did you think we lived off seaweed?” he asks, taking a bite of the fish and sighing at the taste, chewing happily.

“Little children get told scary stories of the Siren people, that they will come in and drink their blood if they misbehave.”

Steve shakes his head, “sounds like the stories we tell the younglings of the humans who will catch them and nail them to the front of their boats if they go too far out of their waters. It’s no wonder our kinds hate each other.”

The air is heavy with something dangerous and they chew in silence for a while. Steve devours his food. He takes another sip of his wine and looks over to Billy who plays with the meat on his plate in thought.

“You don’t hate me, if you did you wouldn’t have saved me.”

Steve’s heart leaps a little in his chest, “I saved you only because you are my only protection here. With you gone, this crew can do what they like with me.”

The Captain’s jaw tenses and his eyes are wide and darting about Steve’s face, but then they soften, his jaw releases its tension and he sits back in his seat.

“Smart little Siren.”

He says that, but Steve isn’t sure exactly why he saved him. It didn’t even come into his mind, not once to leave Billy to die. He wants to blame his instincts, but in that room, he should have recognized Billy as a danger too, not just Tommy. Billy was the one who had caught him and chained him in the first place. And yet, when he was reduced to nothing but his instincts, he had immediately done all he

could to save him.

“Either way, we are from different worlds. I am Siren, you a Pirate, we are destined to be enemies.”

He doesn't quite believe his words, isn't really sure what's going on inside his head where this man is concerned.

Billy wipes his mouth with his napkin and picks up his pipe, stuffing those dried leaves into the end of it, “I wasn't always a pirate.”

Steve raises his eyes from the table to watch him, “you weren't?”

Billy smirks, tapping the end of the pipe on the table before lighting a match and bringing it to his mouth, “I was once a man of high society. My father is an Admiral in the King's Navy. I was a Lieutenant.”

Steve stares at him, “you?”

Billy chuckles in good nature, “hard to believe, I know.”

“What happened?”

Billy extinguishes the match with the flick of a wrist and takes a long suck of his pipe, “it wasn't for me. I found the life of piracy more... prosperous.”

Smoke billows out of his mouth and nose as he speaks, Steve watches it curl and drift in the air, up to the wooden beams above them where they fade into nothing.

“What about your mother?”

The Captain takes a long draw of the pipe and cants his neck back against the back of his chair, blows little rings of smoke up to the ceiling and watching them float for a moment.

“She was a no one. Some serving wench my Father fucked in a tavern one night and got pregnant. She left me on the steps of his home and he never saw her again.”

He sucks on the pipe again, sitting up in the seat, one leg draped over the arm rest and blows smoke out of his nostrils.

“And you? What of your parents?”

Steve had been expecting the question, he takes another sip of his wine and picks at the fruit on his plate, “my parents are gone.”

“Gone? Dead?”

“They left our people.”

He pops a strawberry in his mouth and chews, hoping that would be the end of it. When he looks back to Billy, the blond is looking at him expectantly, tonguing at the end of his pipe. He sighs.

“They always had a fascination with humans. My Mother especially, she preferred to be on land. She would go there as often as she could. When I reached my manhood, they left. They wanted to live as humans, so they left.”

“They didn’t take you?”

He looks down, “I thought I had found my mate at the time. I wanted to stay with her. I was wrong, it didn’t work out in the end.”

“Is that common? For your kind to choose to live on land?”

He shakes his head, “it’s rare. The Chief forbade it, but my Mother was miserable, stayed to herself, snuck up on land any chance she could. I was without her more and more, my Father always following her. Eventually, the Chief permitted them to leave, but forbade them to return so they didn’t endanger our clan.”

“Would you not go to be with them now?”

Steve grits his teeth, “they left me either way, I wouldn’t want to be with them after that. If they loved me enough, I would think they would stay with me, or even want me with them so much that they took me too, but they didn’t. Hopper – our Chief, he’s been more of a parent to me than they ever were. So, I stayed.”

The air is tense with silence. Steve eats his fruit, Billy smokes his pipe and mulls his words over.

“I’m sorry.”

Steve rolls his eyes, “no you’re not.”

“I am.”

He meets his gaze and he looks genuine. Billy looks sincere and Steve isn’t sure what to do with that.

“Thank you,” he says quietly, nodding to the table, “for this.”

Billy smiles around his pipe, “that’s not all,” he says as he stands, gesturing for Steve to follow him.

“The rest of the crew are celebrating too; the night isn’t over yet.”

He pushes the doors open and they burst out into music and dancing. Lanterns are light here and there on deck, barrels of wine and rum are rolled out and crew are everywhere, laughing and cheering when they see the Captain appear, holding their drinks up to him.

A quick glance around confirms to Steve that they have left the harbor town, sailing on in the ocean, no land in sight. He idly wonders how far they have traveled from where they first picked him up. He knows he will find his way home either way, once he finds his way back to the water. The Chief won’t send their warriors out too far, but Steve has snuck out enough times that he knows how to navigate his way back to his home. It doesn’t worry him how far they travel on the ship, he prefers it. He likes seeing these little islands and small towns dotted about in the expanse of sea. He’s never seen any of them, not up this close. It’s more than he ever thought he would get to see and he is surprised by his eagerness to see more.

He sees Robin, Dustin and a few others sitting to the starboard side, leaning against the wooden railings, mugs of drink laden on barrels and crates around them. Billy gets pulled into the throng of dancing by one of the young men and he goes, laughing and stripping off his coat and hat. Steve shuffles his way over to the crew sitting at the side, accepting a mug of wine from Robin as he comes near.

“You finally join us.”

Steve smiles, shy, surprised a little by their enthusiasm to see him, aside from Dustin who sits up in his seat eagerly, his notebook already in hand.

“I take it the raid went as you all wanted?”

“No injuries, two more barrels of wine than we expected, and plenty food stock to last,” Max lists off from where she sits close to Lucas, “we even got another goat.”

She speaks more to the crew than to him, he notices, her eyes glancing to him once or twice before turning away. He wonders for a moment what that means, but a loud whoop comes from the dancing and he turns to look.

The music is lively and pleasant to his ears, the crew playing their instruments grinning from the side of the ship, stamping booted feet on the board to the beat of the melody, calling out to the dancers and cheering them on.

Billy is in the middle of the throng, grinning like a child on his name day and swinging Heather around on his arm. Steve is surprised to see he is actually keeping to some form of pattern in the dance, something rehearsed and choreographed.

“That’s the socialite in him. He always did enjoy the balls and dancing.”

He turns at Robin’s voice, she smiles at him when she catches his eye then looks back to where Billy is spinning with Heather in the middle of the crowd, their hands clasped together between them.

“He told me some about it,” he says, sipping at his wine, “I would never have believed he was a Navy man.”

Hopper had told him about the officers in their blue coats and shining badges. If he ever went on land to trade, he made sure to chose a town with officers stationed, said there was usually less trouble and no danger of pirates raiding. Steve never went on the trades, he was still too young and too gentle and empty headed for it

in Hopper's eyes, but he liked to get the Chief to tell him stories of his journeys.

Robin rolls her eyes, "his father had his life set out for him from before he was even born. He had his wife picked out before he could even walk, the house he would live in, the career he wanted him to have."

"It's no wonder he felt so suffocated," Steve reasons, thinking of the first time he had dared to swim into open water, how cold they seemed but so exciting with their endless, undiscovered expanse all around him.

"I wonder about the woman he left, she must have been heart broken."

Nancy's face came to mind, the day she had held his hand and told him she was bonded with another, how he had felt like the world was going to split in two and he was going to fall into the depths.

Robin chuckles, "She's fine, happier for it. I should know," she says with a crooked smile, turning to look at Steve, "I was the woman he was meant to marry."

"You?"

She laughs at his shocked expression, bracing a hand on his arm as she does.

"Yes, me, I was the daughter of a Duchess, very eligible," she teases, rolling her eyes and looking back to Billy, "I never wanted that life either. So many expectations, so many eyes on you all the time. You could barely be human."

She takes a drink and sighs, bracing her elbows on the top of the railings behind her, "all anyone was interested in was my title. That's what his Father was after. And me, being a woman, being a Duchess' daughter, I was expected to keep my mouth closed and do what I was told, and I did."

"So your mother agreed to the match between you two?"

She nods, "it wasn't perfect, but we weren't in need of money or titles. I think she was just happy to receive an offer for me so soon, I was the worst lady she could have asked for. I hated the dresses and the corsets, the balls and the court appointments. All the other ladies of court were naturals at the flattery and the game of being the perfect, elegant woman of education and society. I was always stealing away to some dark corner to avoid it all. I think she was worried I would spend my life as a spinster."

"I would have thought you and Billy would be a good match. He's kind, under all that bravado."

The words surprise himself. He looks away from Robin for a moment, watching the man in question clap his hands as Heather and another crewman dance together.

"He wasn't always like this. He used to be a pain in the ass."

A grin pulls at his lips, "I can imagine that."

Robin chuckles, her smile faltering a little while she chooses her next words, "he had a lot of poison in him. Before, when he was trying to fit into the image his father had carved out for him, he was different. Always so angry. I used to hear endless stories of him drinking himself silly in taverns, picking fights with anyone that looked at him wrong. The only reason he wasn't kicked out of the Navy was because of his father's influence. He didn't want the shame of a son getting kicked out of the navy, so he thought he could beat the rebellion out of him, but it only made him worse."

Steve remains silent. He watches Billy drink from a flagon of rum, watches the crew around him smile and laugh with him. He looks about at this group of people that clearly care for him and follow him loyally. He thinks of the far away look he's seen in the blond's eyes, the scars he's noticed that decorate his body, the way he plants his feet at any sign of trouble and eyes dart about for danger. He thinks of his gentle hands when he helps Steve to his feet, the smile he gives him when Steve talks with him, even if he's being snarky. He thinks about how he's still alive, still standing there when he could have killed him right away.

There is more to this human than he gave him credit for, so many layers that he wants to learn. Robin, turns, braces her forearms on the railings and looks out to the sea with a smile.

“The day we were supposed to be married he left. I caught him at it, one foot out the door. He told me everything and I just, I understood. It was just like me, trying to fit into somewhere I don’t belong, trying to pretend I could live a life pretending to love someone I didn’t. When he left, I went with him.”

“Then you found Heather?”

She grins, turning back to look over to the brunette where she sits with Maggie and some other men, laughing at something one of them says, a beaded necklace around her neck, a pretty dress on, her dark hair piled atop her head.

“Yeah, it was one of our first raids serving under our first Captain. We went to a tavern after, she was a serving girl there. The second I saw her I just thought she was the most beautiful person I have ever seen. I spent the entire night watching her come and go, pouring drinks and smiling and laughing with the men. Billy eventually had enough of it and called her over. I got so scared I ran out the place.”

Steve laughed, Robin shaking her head, grinning, “you did?”

“I had never been with a woman before, I had no idea what I was doing. She followed me out and we went for a walk by the harbor. She kissed me and I asked her to come with us. She said yes.”

Robin shrugs, finishes her drink and grabs a flagon off the barrel near to them, refilling her mug and Steve’s along with it.

“What about Dustin and Lucas? They’re so young.”

“They signed on at a port one day, it was just when Billy had become Captain. They asked if they could join the crew and he said yes. Dustin wanted to see the world and study the stars and the maps and the people and the creatures” she laughs, looking to the curly headed boy as he shoves at Lucas while Max laughs at him.

“There’s nothing that kid doesn’t want to know about. As for Lucas,

he was training as a medic, but it was made clear to him that he wouldn't be allowed to rise up in rank, he would be a Dr's assistant all his life. Billy promised him he could be the surgeon on board, and when Dustin joined, so did he."

"And he and Max are mated?"

Robin laughs, nearly spitting out a mouthful of her drink as she does, "I don't know about *mated*, but they are together, yes."

"Did *she* leave when Billy did?"

She grins, "no, she hunted him down. It's much of the same story. Billy's dad wanted her to marry into the court and get him in with all the high-ranking lords. Max just wanted to learn how to fight with a sword and see the world. After Billy left, his Father disowned Billy and swore he would weed out pirates. From what I've heard, Max took off, disguised herself as a boy and jumped from ship to ship until she found him. She's been by his side ever since."

There is a lot there that he wants to ask about, but the wine is swimming in his head, making his limbs feel warm and fuzzy and he feels light and happy and just wants to smile and focus on the music and the dancing and the merry spirits all around him.

"What about the rest of the crew?"

"Just like-minded people, some just want to sail the seas, some just want to live a life where they can be who they are. They come and go here and there, but most have served for years. Billy's a good Captain. He's come a long way from brawling in taverns and handing out black eyes to anyone who annoys him."

Steve grins at her, watches her slosh her drink a little as she gestures with her hands as she speaks.

He raises his mug to her, "To 'Black Eye' Bill?"

She laughs, smacking her mug against his, spilling some of its contents, "to Black Eye' Bill."

"Making toasts in my name without me?"

Steve is giggling at Robin licking at some of the drink spilled down her hand, turning as a very flushes Billy appears next to them. His hair is wild, his shirt open and his chest gleams in moisture, Steve isn't sure if it's sweat from his dancing or drink. He's grinning and Steve is a little breathless at the sudden sight of him.

"It's bad luck to drink to your own name," Robin berates him, frowning when the blond takes her mug from her and downs the rest of the contents.

"Bad luck doesn't come near me, I'm golden," Billy grins and Steve makes great effort to focus on Heather when she appears by his side, turning to lean against the railings beside Robin and sag her body against her also damp with sweat and breathless.

Billy grins at her, "another dance?"

"Bill, my feet are about to fall off, ask someone else!" she says breathlessly, rubbing at her bare foot, Robin looping an arm around her waist. Billy tosses down his now empty mug.

"Come on, one more."

"Ask Steve, he's not danced yet," the brunette whines, hiding in Robin's embrace. Steve flounders at the suggestion, looking to Billy with wide, panicked eyes. The blond grins at him.

"Well, Siren-son? Fancy a twirl?"

"Ah – no," Steve stutters out, backing up when Billy advances towards him with a grin on his face, "no, no, thank you."

"Do Sirens not dance?"

"No out of the water."

Billy throws his head back with a laugh, "I'll teach you."

He backs him until he is pressed against the railings and his chain coils over his toes.

"I don't think I will be sure footed with a chain between my legs."

“Well, that’s easily avoided,” Billy says and tugs Steve forwards by his hands.

Steve stumbles but manages to keep on his feet, Billy’s hands are big and warm and hold him firmly but gentle, gently tugging him here and there as he directs Steve about the dance. They skip to the side one way, and then the other, then Billy spins him under his arm. Steve’s chain jingles merrily at the movement and other crew dancing around them spin each other about.

Billy grins and suddenly his arms are around Steve; one on the small of his back, the other holding one of his hands in a sure grip and he tugs Steve to him, pulling him off his feet all together and spins him around in the air.

A burst of laughter escapes him, Billy depositing him on to the floor and taking his hands again to do it all over. Steve, not knowing what he’s doing looks at his feet, concentrating on keeping his chain out the way as he skips left and right. When Billy tugs him forwards to lift him again, he’s laughing, watching the ship and all its crew blur around them as they go.

Its fun, he realizes, amazed. He’s really having fun, truly. It’s been a while since he’s felt free like this, not worried about something or someone. Billy grins at him, holds him in sure, steady hands. He smells like sweat and that comforting combination of scents that make him up and Steve suddenly wants to bury himself in that smell and breathe it in. He’s grinning and he looks like he is shining with it and Steve’s head swims and his heart warms and he trips over the chain and they go sprawling.

Laughter roars around them, cheers and applause and he can feel Billy’s chest move up and down as his laughter joins them. Arms come around him and help them both to their feet and Steve’s face is burning but no one seems to care all that much about his clumsiness.

“Enough dancing, I think,” Billy grins, throwing an arm around Steve’s shoulders and steering him back over to where Robin and the rest of the group are sat around one of the larger crates, each with a drink in hand, laughing.

“Steve, sit here!” Dustin greets him, shuffling over on his bench to make room for Steve who carefully climbs over the beam, holding his chain up until he’s settles in among them.

“Join the game,” one of the men says, sliding a mug of wine over to Steve who catches it.

“What’s the game?”

“We call it Bullshit,” Max says from her place next to Billy who takes his seat across from Steve, accepting his own drink.

Billy grins, looking to Steve across the way with eyes glinting in mirth, “it’s easy; I will tell you two truths and a lie, if you guess the lie I drink, if you guess wrong, you drink.”

Steve nods, trying not to look at the blond for too long, “sounds easy enough.”

They watch as Billy clears his throat, looking up to the stars as he decides on his words. The music still plays behind them, folk still dancing, other crew wandering about the deck. Steve watches the column of Billy’s throat as he swallows, the blond dipping his head back down when he decides, smirking at Steve.

“I have blue eyes,” he says, voice like a purr and Steve sips his mug, trying to focus, “I have a tattoo for my ship’s name... I never learned how to swim.”

A few chuckles ring out here and there, Max rolls her eyes and Lucas grins next to her.

“Well, Stevie? What’s the lie?”

Billy holds his gaze with heavy eyes, a grin pulling at his lips and Steve tries his best to ignore the heat curling in his stomach under the scrutiny. He looks at the dark liquid in his mug and mulls it over in his head.

He knows the Captain has blue eyes – that one is obviously a truth. He thinks, tries to remember all the times he’s seen Billy strut about without a shirt or trousers on. The nudity doesn’t bother him, but

he's never sat and leered at him, always looked away to stave off any satisfaction Billy might have received from trying to make him uncomfortable. He can't recall ever seeing anything other than skin – a few scars here and there, but no tattoos. Besides, a Navy man that can't swim, it sounds a bit far-fetched.

He clears his throat and feels all eyes on him as he meets the Captain's gaze, "The tattoo is a lie."

There is a beat of silence before Billy grins, he nods to Steve's mug he holds in his hand, "drink."

"What?"

Max rubs her eyes, "I forgot you have that stupid tattoo."

"I thought he was going to die of infection after getting it," Robin chimed in, Heather sitting on her lap, giggling.

"I don't think the man who gave him it even knew what a scorpion looks like," Lucas says and Billy leans over to thump his arm.

Steve looks at Billy, aghast and the blond is grinning, looking all together too pleased with himself. He nods to Steve's drink again and the Siren sighs, raising it to his lips and cheers erupt all around as he takes a deep gulp.

"Your turn, Steve," Lucas says and Steve thinks hard.

"He could so easily win this, there is so much we don't know about him," Heather whines.

"I'll know if he's lying," Billy says with a smirk and Steve raises his chin in defiance. If this human wants to play, then he's going to give him a good game.

Steve tilts his head, clicking his tongue against his teeth and plays with the rim of his mug. He sees Billy follow his movements out of the corner of his eye and tries not to grin.

"I am fluent in eight languages," he begins, biting his lip as he thinks, "I know a girl who has magic powers -"

“- What do you mean by magic powers? What are magic powers? To us, Sirens are magic -”

“- Dusty, calm,” Robin says as Dustin threatens to climb into Steve’s lap with his eagerness to ask him questions.

Steve giggles, looking back to Billy who is watching him patiently, “I have never been in love.”

Billy leans closer, rests his chin on his hand and narrows his eyes at Steve, one corner of his lips curled up at the corner as he studies him. Steve holds his gaze, looking right into his eyes with a steady, unwavering gaze.

He chose his words carefully, he isn’t sure if Billy will guess correctly. He’s already told him plenty about himself, he knows he speaks the human tongue well and surely learning more languages than his own isn’t so outlandish to them. On top of that, humans still have their fables and stories. El’s powers – as far as his people know – are unique, magic or whatever they are, he doubts humans would believe that.

He’s told Billy about Nancy, how he was so sure that she was his bonded, for a long, long time he had believed what he felt for her was love, but he learned the hard way that it wasn’t. It’s been years, he doesn’t think of her like that anymore, now, the heart break is replaced by a resounding silence. A panging in his chest that aches to *feel*, to know what its like to really, truly be in love.

He told Billy that his kind mate only once and for life – and its true, but he doesn’t think Billy will know that Steve can tell the difference between being in love and thinking he is. Steve’s had a reputation all his life for being a little air headed, the entire clan knows, he’s sure Billy thinks the same.

Their group is quiet while Billy studies him. Eventually, he sighs, holds his gaze and speaks, head still rested in his hand, “you’ve never been in love.”

Steve’s blood runs cold. Its strange, the finality of it, the truth that rings in him just from hearing those words spoken out loud by

someone that isn't him. Billy's voice is soft, but not pitying, not teasing, Steve suddenly feels bared, like this human can see right into his soul.

The group is still quiet and it makes Steve's skin itch. He doesn't like all the eyes on him, doesn't like the way they all seem to be thinking the same thing.

Steve gives a laugh and picks up his mug, takes a large gulp from it, then another, then finishes the whole thing. He wipes his mouth and the crew's mood lightens.

"Wait, does that mean the magic one is true?"

"Dustin, calm down."

"Are there even eight languages in the world?"

"By the powers, Charlie, did you really just ask that?"

They move on from the game, Robin and Heather taking turns. Steve tries to focus on what they say, but he keeps feeling Billy's eyes on him. He refills his mug and takes another drink and tries to block him out.

V

His head is fuzzy and the deck spins a little as he gets up from his seat. Crew are dotted here and there, some passed out, some still drinking, the music has long since stopped and a few of the lanterns have burned out.

His chain clinks against his toes and he grumbles, kicking at it uselessly. A warm hand presses to his shoulder and he smells pipe smoke and the ocean.

“Come on, little Siren, to bed with you.”

Billy comes into view beside him, a little burred and he keeps spinning, but Steve smiles, relieved to see him. He reaches out to pat his face to let him know this and the blond flinches when he unceremoniously smacks his still tender nose, grunting as he pulls away and catches Steve’s flailing hand in his own.

“Okay, hang on,” he says and suddenly the ground drops away from Steve’s feet and he’s being carried by the Captain towards the cabin doors.

“I c’n walk.”

He sees Billy nod out of the corner of his eye, “best not to test that theory,” he says, kicking the doors open and Steve whimpers a little. The cabin is nice and dark and Steve sighs happily when he is pressed into something soft and comfortable and smelling like Billy.

“This isn’ the floor.”

“Nothing gets past you, huh?”

Steve giggles and swats at where Billy’s voice is coming from, eyes already closed and he rolls, holding onto one of the plush pillows and buries his nose into it. Something taps his forehead and he squints his eyes open in annoyance, Billy knelt close to him, holding a pail in his hand.

“This is a bucket, if you need to hurl, do it in here.”

“M’no gonna hurl,” Steve slurs, batting at Billy who deposits the bucket by the bed all the same.

Metal clinks around his ankle, cold but oddly welcoming against his heated skin as Billy tucks his feet into the blankets. The mattress dips next to him and he sinks lower into the lush sheets.

“I c’nt believe ‘ou can’t swim,” Steve slurs into the pillow. Billy sighs.

“Goodnight, Siren-son.”

He opens his mouth to reply, but it dies on his tongue, sleep already stealing him away.

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

More than that, there is something in the air between him, Steve's felt it from the first moment he laid eyes on the human. Some charged, alive thing that runs from his body to the human's. He's seen it reflected back to him in those eyes when they looked at each other across an overturned crate and the rest of the world seemed to fade away.

And still, underlying it all, hanging over his head like the chain clipped around his ankles, is Billy's plan.

He let it slip from his mind last night, too wrapped up in the celebrations and Billy's laughing and the feeling of being surrounded by people he actually likes and enjoys spending time with. Now, hungover and land-sick and tired of not knowing what the day is going to bring him, he just needs to know.

"How are you going to do it?"

His voice is quiet, the question breathed out into the air like a water drop falling into still water. He swallows, looks at Billy all the while who is sitting rigid, staring out of the window to the dark water that reflects the overcast sky above.

"I don't know." He says at last, just as quiet.

When Steve wakes, it is to blinding white light and pain.

He groans, rolls over and shoves his face into the soft surface next to him, squeezing his eyes closed against the light. His head thumps and his mouth tastes sickly sweet and dry as sand on a hot day.

There is movement beside him and he groans, burying his face deeper into the plush, trying to catch the fading ropes of sleep. He hasn't

been this bad since the first time he drank with his friends, under the watchful eye of the chief on the day of reaching his manhood. He kicks his feet in a small tantrum when the dream land continues to elude him, forcing him to exist on this hellish plane where the aftermath of wine slowly shrinks his brain. His chain clinks around his feet where they dangle off the side of the bed and his reality comes back to him slowly.

He opens his eyes and squints, groaning and rolling on to his back, kicking blindly at his chain when it tangles with the edge of the sheets. He pulls the pillow up and squashes it against his face, taking a moment to lie there on his back, willing his stomach to stop rolling.

“Feeling rough?”

The voice of the Captain is gravelly and thick from sleep. It sends pleasant shivers down his spine and he turns his head slowly, peeking out to the side from under the protection of his pillow.

Billy lies on his stomach, face turned to look at him where it rests on the mattress, golden curls splayed about. He looks tired, but miles better than Steve feels, smiling softly at him when he notices Steve’s peeking eye.

“I think I’m dying.”

The blond chuckles and he shuts his eyes again, yawning and nuzzling back into the mattress. Steve watches him, glaring a little at the light streaming in through the windows behind the human.

“I put a mug of water next to the bucket for you.”

The bucket? The bucket...*the bucket.*

Steve suddenly remembers being put to bed the night before; Billy’s arms around him, carrying there, the way he had laid him down in his own bed like he belonged there. He remembers the way he had looked at him while playing the lying game, the gleam in his eyes and the curve of his lips. The way he had smiled and thrown his head back in a laugh, all lit up like the morning sun as he swung Steve around in the dance.

Billy's still looking at him, still just lying there, soft from sleep and glowing in the early morning light. Steve allows his gaze to travel over his face, down the curved line of his neck to the broad spread of his shoulders, along the curve of his back to where his body disappears behind the crumpled bed sheets. From here, this close and with the white morning light streaming in, Steve can see them; thin, barely there scars. Long, white lines that run in haphazard crosses across his back. One or two curve and he realises with a sobering shock that they match the shape of the buckles of the belts he has seen the humans wear around their waists.

He remembers what Robin told him about his Father, how he tried to beat the rebellion out of Billy. He remembers what Billy had told him about life in the Navy as a man like him, how one could face a whipping for desiring a man of his own sex. It turns his stomach in a new way, nothing to do with the drink he had the night before.

He turns his head away, rolls to his other side and fishes over the edge of the bed for the water, taking a long, grateful drink when he finds it. He realises he is still wearing his clothes from the night before, the front of his shirt a little stained from spilling wine down it. Billy sits up in the bed behind him, scrubbing at his eyes and shaking out his curls. Steve turns his head to look at him over his shoulder.

He really is handsome with his golden skin and golden hair that tumbled down past his shoulders. His skin is smooth over toned muscles, like the roll of great ocean waves. His eyes are the blue of Steve's home, his mouth curved and pink and inviting. His laugh has come to be a sound Steve likes to hear most of all and he just doesn't understand how someone so beautiful can be something so cruel.

He doesn't understand *him*. He's gentle. He laughs with him. He makes sure to feed him and dresses him in his own clothes and he might be keeping him out of the water, but other than that he has treated him well.

More than that, there is something in the air between him, Steve's felt it from the first moment he laid eyes on the human. Some charged, alive thing that runs from his body to the human's. He's seen it reflected back to him in those eyes when they looked at each

other across an overturned crate and the rest of the world seemed to fade away.

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"I don't know." He says at last, just as quiet.

Steve has his heart in his throat. He knows what he has to ask but he wishes, Gods, how he wishes he would get the answer he wants.

"You're really going to?"

He is shocked by the lump rising in his throat. He didn't realize that all this time, after spending so much time with the blond, after being welcomed into the crew and treated like a friend. After dancing with him and looking at him and being put to bed by him, how did he not feel the things Steve was feeling?

"I have to."

The ground seems to drop out from under Steve and his blood runs cold. His head throbs as he stands and Billy turns around, eyes wary as he watches the Siren wobble on unsteady feet.

"Then just kill me already," he says in a shaky voice, ignoring the flare of pain behind his eyes and the way his throat burns, "I'm not waiting around another day for you to grow some balls and do what you brought me here for."

Billy stands too, just in his trousers, holding his hands out to Steve in peace, "Steve -"

"- No! No more Steve, no more stringing me along like a toy, no more acting like you're my friend when I know that one day you're just going to gut me like the fish I am!"

"I was trying to find another way -"

"- There *is* no other way. You know it, I know it, you've made your bed, now you have to lie in it."

He storms across the room and picks up Billy's sheathed knife from the desk and Billy flinches when he slaps it flat against his chest.

"Do it," he says in a low voice, "or set me free."

Billy's chest heaves against his hand where he holds the blade to him. He doesn't break his gaze away, staring at Steve with an entire sea storm raging behind his eyes. He doesn't take the knife. He doesn't do a goddamn thing.

Steve shakes his head and rips his hand away, the knife clattering to the ground between their feet. He turns and storms over to the doors, throwing them open and marching out onto the deck, his chain clattering noisily against the boards as he goes. He's not really sure where he thinks he is going, he just needs to get out of that room and away from that man.

Billy swears loudly behind him and thunders after him. The crew that are dotted around the deck jump up at the noise, heads turning in shock as he clammers past, Billy hot on his heels. He pays none of them any mind.

"Get back here, Steve."

"I'll go where I damn well please."

A hand grabs his arm and spins him around and he glares right back at Billy as he grips him close.

"I am the Captain of this ship, what I say is law."

Steve rips his hand out of the heavy grip and comes close to hiss in the man's face, "you forget that I am not part of your crew, you are not my Captain."

"You are my p-"

He cuts himself off, jaw flexing as he grinds his teeth and Steve barks out a harsh laugh.

"Prisoner. Just say it."

Billy's nostrils flare but his mouth remains clamped shut, his eyes full of fire, flitting all over Steve's face, to his eyes that he knows himself are narrowed to slits. He shakes his head.

"Just say it. You can't have it both ways. I'm your prisoner, you're my captor and there isn't anything you are willing to do to change that."

"Steve -"

Steve can't hear that again. He can't listen to the man saying his name like that, like it *means* something.

His fist curls before he even realizes it and he's swinging his arm and he punches the Captain of *The Scorpion* right in the mouth.

Shouts ring out all around as Billy's head whips to the side. He doesn't go sprawling because he's planted his stupid feet and it only serves to enrage Steve more.

Billy turns to him, blood forming at the corner of his mouth and Steve shoves him as hard as he can. The blond doesn't budge.

"You're a damn coward," Steve shouts, shoving at him again and this time Billy does stumble back. He curls his own fists at his sides and Steve wants him, *dares* him to hit him back like the man he was pretending to be.

Crew move closer but Billy stays them with a jerk of his chin and he levels Steve with an angry glare.

“Why didn’t you just kill me when you caught me?”

He shoves at him again.

“Why haven’t you just done it already?”

Another shove.

“You’ve had plenty of opportunity – what have you been stalling for?”

Billy snaps, hands lashing out and catch Steve by his upper arms, gripping him in a strong, almost painful grip and holds him close to hiss in his face, blood trickling down his chin.

“It was supposed to be easy. I thought I could do it. Since she left, I’ve hated them, hated her for leaving me with him and choosing herself and her people over her own son.”

Steve freezes. The crew freezes. The entire world seems to grind to a halt.

Billy is seething, his chest heaving, his pupils narrowed to slits.

“I spent years hating your kind. Years I let my Father poison my mind, only to have him hate me, disown me and hunt me down to kill me. I am everything he hates – both of the things he despises most in this world.”

Steve can do nothing more than stare, the anger seeping out of him like a wave retreating from the shore. Billy’s fingers are shaking and his grip is hard enough to bruise.

“You asked me what I could possibly want a fortune for. I need an armada. I need ships under my command, weapons, crew. I need enough arms so that when he finds me – and he will – I can ensure that I will outlive the bastard.”

I want to sell your scales. Just one could buy me a whole new ship. The entire tail could set me and my crew to live the rest of our lives...

So, that’s it.

Max appears in the corner of Steve's vision. Gentle hands peel Billy's grip off him and he stumbles back to his feet.

"That's enough, Bill."

Billy tears his gaze away and Steve feels like he's about to sink to his knees. When he turns back to him, his face is impassive, his eyes back to their normal shape.

"Jack."

The man steps forwards, "Captain."

Billy doesn't look at him, "take him to my cabin, make sure he's secured."

Steve is too numb to fight the man's hold.

V

Steve isn't left alone for very long.

Jack clips him back to the chain by his bedding on the floor. The man is three times the size of Steve and even if he had the energy to fight, he would lose. He knows it, Billy knows it.

When he is sure he is secured, he is dismissed by Max who had followed them in without Steve realizing it. She closes the doors behind her gently, glancing to Steve who sinks to the floor, keeping his eyes to the embroidered blanket beneath him.

"Billy and some crew are going ashore to a tavern. You'll have some peace for a time."

Steve didn't even realize they were coming upon land. There are lots of little islands and harbor towns in this part of the world, they've been passing one every so often in the past day or so. Sometimes they stop, most times they don't. He had heard talk the night of the raid of men complaining that they wouldn't be stopping at taverns for drinking and whores. He hadn't thought much of it at the time. He suddenly becomes aware of the far away noises of harbor. They must have made mooring and lowered a rowboat or two. They did that once before when the town was on the route of Navy vessels for a quick escape.

"I haven't seen him angry and act out like that since we still lived with his Father."

If she is looking for a reaction from him, he gives none. It doesn't seem to deter her. She moves, sits on the end of the messy bed and pushes her long hair over one shoulder with a sigh. She frowns and mulls over her words, looking older than she really is.

"I don't agree with his plan. I haven't from the beginning."

Steve would scoff, but he hasn't the energy for it.

"Then why don't you stop him?"

She cuts her eyes to him, her jaw set in the same stubborn flex he's seen Billy do a hundred times.

"He's my Captain before my brother. I won't disobey my commander."

"Right," the Siren says with a sour smile, "his rules."

"Not just that. I don't know all of what your people think of Pirates, but I've heard some. Despite what you might think, we are honorable. We don't break promises and we stand by our Captain."

Steve elects to listening after that. Max hasn't spoke to him more than a few words before. He always thought it was for a dislike of him. Now, to learn that it is quite the opposite, he's intrigued to hear more of what she has to say. She sighs, a long, heavy sigh that speaks of years of weariness.

“His Father – he’s dangerous. He’s spent his whole life rising his rank and gathering an army. He hates Pirates, he hates Sirens, he hates anything that doesn’t fit into his perfect idea of society. He would go to the ends of the earth and burn the world with him if it meant getting to Billy.”

Steve had been taught his entire life of the ruthlessness of pirates. Until he was caught, he’s never had any reason to doubt it. Now, he wonders if the Chief somehow had it backwards.

“I’m not saying his plan is right, but I understand the fear he feels,” she continues, raising her eyes to meet Steve’s.

“Billy’s impulsive. He doesn’t think everything through, he’s cocky. Most of that he’s worked on and bettered himself to become the good Captain he is today. When it comes to his Father, it’s like all of that strips away and all that’s left is that scared boy I met all those years ago who turned white as a sheet whenever his Father walked into the same room as him. If he were going to kill you, he would have done it the day he caught you.”

“Then why won’t he let me go.”

She stands, tosses her hair over her shoulder and shrugs, “because just like he can’t bring himself to kill you, he can’t bring himself to let you go.”

She crosses to the door. Steve looks up as she pulls them open, then pauses. She just stands there, staring out to the open deck, chest rising and falling with her breathing, her long hair swaying in the ocean breeze.

She turns to him and looks at him for a long time, some unreadable expression on her face. She seems to decide on something and comes forwards, fishing something out of her pocket.

Steve flinches, scrambling back and feels his fight or flight kicking in, claws beginning to extend in lack of a weapon.

She catches him by the chain and he freezes when she pulls the key out of her pocket.

She doesn't say a word as she slides it into its lock and turns it, the all familiar metallic click resonating like a bell's toll in the space between them. The cuffs fall away with a click and she unlocks the other, it joining its brother in a pile on the blankets between them.

She raises her eyes slowly.

"I'm sorry," she whispers, then she stands, tossing the key away and hurrying back to the doors.

"Max, wait!"

She pauses, hands on the door handles.

He thinks of Billy's pupils narrowing to slits. He thinks of the way he always looks golden, like the sun has sunk into his skin. He thinks of the gold scale he keeps hung around his neck.

"Did you know? About him?"

She looks at him, shakes her head sadly, "no. None of us did."

She leaves the room after that, closing the doors firmly behind her.

Steve springs to his feet, ankles stiff but finally, *finally* free of the cumbersome chain. He makes a dash for the window, the one that never seems to fully shut and pushes it open on still, creaking hinges as wide as it will go. Its not much room, he's lucky he is as skinny as he is, he will only just manage to squeeze through.

He peers out and sees the water below, the dark, frothing, seeming to wave and beckon him to it. He braces a hand on the window pane and raises a still leg on to the wooden ledge.

He pauses.

He watches the water roll and crash against the side of the ship, he hears some crew on the deck and the far away music of the harbor town. He grips the metal of the pane in his hand and curses, climbing back down to the wooden floor.

He looks about the room, his way to the window is encumbered

slightly by the table. He shoves it to the side, the thing is heavy and goes slowly but it moves, just enough to give him a direct route to the window from his bedding. He moves the armchair, angles it out of the way too and paces back and forth as quietly as he can, making sure that there is nothing that will trip him or be in his way when he makes his run for it.

When he is satisfied, he returns to his bedding, tucks his cuffs under his blanket and leaves the chain peeking out just a little, making it look just like normal. He sits, adjusts the blanket around him to hide his legs and waits.

His heart in his throat, he waits until the sun has set in the sky and the room is cast warm by the sunset.

He jumps when one of the cabin doors open and Billy steps into the room. The blond keeps his jaw angled, decidedly ignoring the corner of the room he knows Steve is in.

Steve watches as he takes the hat off from his head and tosses it onto the tabletop, knocking aside maps and a few other objects sitting there. He strikes a match and lights the lantern sitting there, the candle already burned out halfway from prior use. It gives the room a small, intimate light.

“I didn’t expect you to return so soon.”

Billy shrugs and unclasps his cloak, pulling it off and hanging it on a hook behind the door in one, smooth movement.

“I don’t have much taste for whores.”

Steve picks at a loose thread in the blanket he sits under, “you are too good for them?”

Dark eyes cut to Steve quickly, then are cast down as the Captain sits in his chair and bends to unlace his boots.

“I prefer not to buy affections.”

Steve bites his tongue and stays silent, watching as the blonde unlaces his second boot and pulls them off, setting them neatly beside

one another on the floor.

He contents himself to watch the Captain move about in his night routine, undressing slowly and placing each item carefully in its pre-determined place. When he wears nothing more than his breeches, he pauses, slowly pulling off each ring from his fingers and setting them in a carved wooden box on the writing desk.

The sound of the waves outside whisper quietly through the still open window. Steve can hear gentle music from the deck and the creak of the ship's boards as men and women come and go. The hour is late, but these humans don't seem to want to rest yet.

His eyes stray from where they had wandered to stare off out the misted glass windows, back to where the Captain now sits back in his armchair. He holds a few pages of parchment in his hands, looking down at them, illuminated in the soft candlelight. A pair of round spectacles sit balanced across the bridge of his nose and Steve stares at them for a beat too long in bewilderment, having never seen them before.

He sits rigid, anxious upon the bedding. His chain sitting heavy around his ankles, still warm from his skin, coiled around his feet beneath the blanket.

He waits and doesn't really know what for.

"If the light bothers you, tell me," Billy says, voice soft and intimate in the quiet space. His eyes never stray from the papers in hand, but he tilts his head slightly towards Steve, a few strands of golden hair falling across one eye. He seems unbothered by them, continuing to read, brow creased slightly in concentration.

"The light?"

He nods, "yes. The light. If you wish to sleep and it is bothering you, tell me."

"Are you not..." he was going to say 'coming to bed,' but it sounds too intimate, too soft for the anger that is still running through his veins. He thinks, trying to find a better phrasing for the question.

"I'm not much tired yet," Billy says, leaning back in the chair which gives an awful creak. Billy freezes for half a second, looking like he is expecting it to collapse beneath him, then relaxes. Steve watches his jaw flex and he hates that he almost smiles.

Steve twitches beneath the blanket, feeling coiled tight like a spring. Billy still just sits there, pretending to read his papers and seemingly content to wait for Steve to succumb to his need for rest. But that's not why he is still here.

"Before...your eyes -"

Billy looks up from the papers with a quick move, jaw flexing as he peels off his glasses and tosses them and his papers to join his hat on the desktop.

"What do you want from me, Steve?"

Steve takes a breath, forcing himself to remain calm. He doesn't want to resort to yelling and arguing like they did before. He needs answers and he's not going to get them if he makes Billy angry and defensive again. He tries his next words carefully, watching Billy's every movement for a gauge on his reaction.

"I want to know the truth, everything, I *need* to know. Please, Billy."

The blond stares for a long time at the floor, jaw tense, eyes narrowed, his long legs spread out before him. He rubs his eyes with his hand and sits up, turns to pick up his pipe and load it with its leaves and lighting it. He settles back in his chair, still avoiding Steve's eye and takes a long pull of it.

"I never knew my Mother. All I know of her he told me – the rest I figured out on my own."

Smoke whips out of his nose and mouth as he talks, he takes another quick drag and it billows out of his nose in two long streams. Steve stays as still as he can and just watches, waits, terrified to break this glass dome of ceasefire between them, finally getting the answers to the questions that have plagued his mind for days.

"She came ashore when she reached her womanhood – I always

guessed it was for some love of humans. Got work in a tavern. One night, my Father's fleet arrived. They settled in the town, on patrol of the waters there and assisted the trading company in setting the place up as a main trading post."

He speaks slowly and deliberately – a story he has never breathed out loud before and he's working it out as he goes, how to tell it the way he has held it in his head all these years. He smokes some more, the fingers of his other hand playing with the burnt out matches he's forgotten to discard.

"She didn't tell him what she was and she got pregnant by him. He wanted nothing to do with it and tried to get her to be rid of it. She refused. She bore me, left me on his doorstep, then she slipped back into the sea."

He sighs and bites the end of his pipe, enough to crack it before setting it down on the tabletop, the embers burning out on their own as he leans forwards in the chair, resting his elbows on his knees and staring off into the corner of the room.

"I tried to make myself hate her. I wanted to; it would have been easier if I did. I wanted to despise her for leaving me with him when she knew what he was like. He had raised me to hate them, but I never did. I knew all of what he told me wasn't true. He let me believe she was just some human whore for so long, but when I grew older, when I started rebelling against his expectations of me, he saw my eyes, it confirmed I was some part like her. He stopped trying to hide his hatred for me and refused to call me his son. He couldn't stand the very sight of me."

His hand moves to the glint of gold hanging around his neck, rubbing at it absentmindedly as he speaks.

"I started trying to learn what I could. I read all the books I could find; spoke to every sailor I came across and it was only when I met my first Pirate that I heard any real stories. The more I learned, the more I researched, I knew she couldn't have used her song on him while she was living on land. I knew that he wasn't the man I had thought he was and the more I learned, the more I fought back, the harder he hit. I started picking fights with anyone in the Navy, I was

always so angry, someone would notice my eyes and I would kick off. My Dad got tired of paying off those I hurt and started flogging me for my trouble until I couldn't take it anymore."

Ge lets go of the scale and it sways against his chest, "he kept this in a safe box in his room. He told me it was all she had left to him. He kept it to remind himself of Siren treachery and as motivation to wipe them out. I stole it when I ran away."

Billy finally looks at him and Steve's heart aches when he sees the tears staining his face.

"I wanted to find her. I thought perhaps I could, but I never did. The more I searched, the more it seemed like they didn't even exist. If it weren't for the evidence around my neck, I would have believed none of it was true. Eventually, I decided to become my own man, rise to Captain, get my own ship, my own crew, live the way I wanted to."

He laughs bitterly, shaking his head.

"He wouldn't let me. He has been hunting me since I left home, been raising his rank in the Navy, married into the court, managed to get the King to charge him solely with the extermination of Pirates. He wants to wipe them off the face of the earth, and I am on the top of his list. He has already killed many of my friends, Captains I sailed under, learned from, traded with, anyone that sails under the Pirate colors. Entire generations of pirates have been blown to debris and now lie rotting at the bottom of the ocean by his hand."

He's shaking now, even from where he sits, desperately trying not to get up and comfort him, Steve can see his pupils narrowing.

"He has been catching up to me year by year. My crew are some of the few left on these waters, others have gone into hiding or flee to seas not voyaged by the King's justice. I knew if I ever wanted to be rid of him, this was the only way."

Steve remains silent. He asked, and now his questions are answered. He understands Max now – he understands Billy, his plan, his fear. He doesn't agree with it – far from it, but he gets it.

He thought he might get some final closure – some relief hearing the truth, but he doesn't. There is still a weight on his shoulders, still a heavy burden on his chest. He thought he might hear Billy out, give him a piece of his mind and escape. He could swim away with the human fading from his mind and move on with his life, all of this nothing but a distant memory.

He didn't imagine anything close to what Billy told him. There is so *much*, so much he is conflicted about. He looks beyond Billy to the window, still open, still letting the sounds of the sea trickle into the air. The remaining smoke from Billy's now burnt-out pipe curls and loops lazily over to it, a gust dragging it out and dispersing it in the open air.

"Thank you, for telling me," he begins, taking a breath and pausing. He's not sure what it is he wants to say.

He's sorry, sincerely, he's sorry that Billy has had the life he has. He's sorry that his Mother left him to be raised in hatred and beaten for being himself. He's sorry that she didn't take him with her. Perhaps they could have known each other some other way. He's sorry that he has had to watch friends, mates die at the hands of a monster. He's sorry that he could only find one way out.

Most of all, he's sorry that he is going to leave him.

Billy stands with a sigh, scrubbing a hand over his face and finally turning to Steve.

His eyes soften when he looks at him there, flicking all over his face, his hair, down his body, still clothed in his wine-stained things.

A smile pulls slowly at his lips – small, barely there and the saddest thing Steve has ever seen.

"I'll find another way."

Steve's heart skips a beat.

"What?"

Billy nods to himself and steps forwards, kneeling before him, one

hand fishing in his pocket for the key that Steve knows isn't there. He flinches, unsure what to do, mind trying to keep up with Billy's words.

"I'm letting you go."

He pulls the blanket away and Steve springs to his feet. Billy remains kneeling where he is.

Steve's heart is racing as he looks down at Billy who has frozen in place, eyes on his bare ankles. Slowly, his head tilts back and he rises to his feet until he is standing face to face with Steve who is breathing heavy, heart racing, not sure what is going to happen next. He doesn't want to tell him it was Max lest Billy decides to punish her for disobeying him.

"How long have you been free?"

Steve's eyes flick to the ground, to the window, to Billy.

"Since you left for the tavern."

Its like he can hear Billy's heart thumping in his chest, he's so close. Steve's breathing fast, adrenaline pumping through his veins.

"You didn't leave."

He shakes his head, "I...I had to ...I -"

He trails off, not sure how to put into words why he didn't leave as soon as he could because he's not even sure himself.

"I had to know."

It isn't what he wants to say, he feels the words leave his mouth but it's like there is a string tied to them, running down Steve's throat and wrapped around somewhere inside him where the things he wants to say are hiding but just won't come out. Billy doesn't make any motion that he has even heard Steve speak.

Billy steps closer and Steve sways when the smell of him seems to surround him, all honeyed wine and the sea air and his pipe smoke

and sugared cherries. He's so close. Closer than he's ever been before. If Steve tilts his head just so, his nose would brush against Billy's. He's never noticed that he is just an inch or so taller than him. He can feel his breath; hot and curling against his skin in the space between them. The light is faint, but he can see the glint he likes so much in Billy's eyes, cast dark in the low light.

His eyes are heavy and on Steve and his mouth is parted, his breathing is like the warm summer current in the deep of the sea, curling through the cold water to tease against Steve's skin and draw him up, up to the surface to feel the summer heat on his scales.

He's not sure who moves, he doesn't honestly care.

All he really thinks about is the way a curl falls across his cheek as he tilts his head and then there is a warm, soft press against his mouth. It's not his first kiss. It's not even the first kiss he's had in human form, but it is different in every way from any kiss he has ever been given before.

Billy is gentle, warm, and at the same time his lips are firm and sure. It's just the slightest pressure against his mouth, but it has little sparkles bursting behind his eyelids and his stomach heavy with a heat he's never felt before. He chases the feeling as Billy starts to pull back, pursuing his lips until they press back again.

Billy makes a small noise of surprise then his hand comes up to cup Steve's jaw and he's kissing him again. He kisses Steve like he would rather be doing nothing else and Steve has hardly a thought in his mind. Billy slides his tongue across Steve's bottom lip slowly and he opens his mouth and shivers when Billy tastes him. The Captain rumbles a noise against his mouth and it drips like nectar down his spine. Hands press firm but not ungentle against his skin, holding him like an anchor in a storm.

Steve tilts his head back to breathe, Billy looking at him with heavy eyes. He leans down and Steve feels his hands at the back of his thighs and before he even knows what he is doing, he is scooped off his feet, Billy wrapping his legs around his waist and turns, carrying him to the bed. He lays Steve down gently and dips his head to kiss him again. Steve all about tugs him down until he's pressed against Steve,

hot and hard and fitting right into every concave. A hand presses against his hip and he opens his eyes.

Billy leans down over him, one leg between both his own his hand still on his hip, the other curled into the hair atop his head. He's pressed against him so deliciously, but that's not what catches Steve's attention now.

He's never seen Billy look so content before. He's breathing heavy, his mouth swollen from their kiss, the candlelight bathing his skin honey warm and highlighting the blush on his cheeks. His eyes are half closed and soft as they look down at Steve, that glint still there but its brighter, warmer. His mouth is curled up at the corners and his fingers move back and forth gently through the stands of Steve's hair.

"I've waited an age to hold you like this."

"Billy."

His voice is hoarse and catches on the word, it only seems to make Billy smile more and he is grateful when he seems to decide against teasing him and instead tilts his head down to press a kiss to the side of his throat, then another lower.

Steve doesn't even try to hide his eagerness, his hands coming around Billy's back, fingers tangling clumsily in the cotton shirt to keep him there, keep him close, keep him kissing him. Billy's body is a hot and solid weight against him that feels so perfectly good. His mouth against his skin makes him feel like he is burning with it. He pants and arches when Billy licks over his pulse and his teeth scrape so slightly over the pulsing patch of skin.

His hand slides down his side and he rolls and Steve feels him pressed hot and heavy against him through the layers of cloth between them and he realizes in a rush of heat his own hardness presses back, straining against his trousers.

He comes back to his senses, grips at Billy's shoulders.

"I can't – I don't want -"

Billy moves immediately, leaning back and removing the pressure of him off Steve's body but the Siren scrambles to keep him close, turning his head in the sheets to look up into his face that is full of concern and patience.

"Shh, its okay - no bonding, it's okay. I'm sorry I just, I got lost in you for a moment."

It makes Steve blush, it makes him glow. Such an honest admittance of how much this human wants him, how much effect he has on him and not even needing to use his song.

"It's okay - me too."

Billy smiles down at him, leans forwards and presses a kiss to Steve's forehead.

The blond rolls off him, but keeps him close, his hands holding on to Steve's shirt like he's afraid he is going to disappear right in front of him.

"Will you stay? Until the morning?"

Steve nods, having no mind to leave the human's embrace – not yet. Billy draws him close, lets Steve bury himself into his chest, breathing in that scent like he's been wanting to do for so long. Billy's hand buries in his hair and plays with the strands, rubs soft fingers over his scalp and it has Steve's eyes slipping shut in pleasure, his weariness catching up to him.

His eyes slip closed as the candle dies out on the desk, dousing the room in darkness. He hears the waves roll by outside, the sounds of the town still alive in the distance. He listens to Billy's heart beat strong and sure beneath his ear and slips into the dark embrace of sleep.

Notes for the Chapter:

Buckle in, lads, we're only halfway through!

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

He laughs, Billy grinning back at him and Steve wants, he wants so much to share this with him, he wants Billy to feel how incredible the water can be and how freeing it is to be surrounded by endless space and floating like you're flying above the clouds.

"I'll take care of you, I won't let you drown, I promise."

Billy looks at him for a long moment, smiling softly, eyes seeming to reflect the sparkle of the sun on the water. He sighs dramatically and leans back, kicking his legs up and disappears from sight.

Steve sobers for a moment, looking for movement, worrying he's pushed to hard for something he isn't ready for. He hears thudding of bare feet on the deck and Billy reappears, running towards the edge and Steve's eyes widen and his mouth spreads into a grin.

Max was right; he really is too impulsive for his own good.

Steve kicks back, ready to watch where he hits the water and make sure he can hold him if he panics.

Billy stutters to a stop right at the edge, catching himself with an iron grip on the posts and looks down at Steve with wide eyes.

"I chickened out," he says.

The familiar, gentle rocking of the boat pulls Steve slowly from sleep and he opens his eyes as the sun is beginning to peek over the horizon.

He is groggy and feels like he hasn't managed to sleep at all. He needs the water soon, his skin feels tight and his head pangs a little with dehydration. Despite this, he feels good, nuzzles into the soft touch of the sheets, pressing his nose into that nice smell and his nose brushes something soft and fur like.

He opens his eyes slowly, blinking away the tresses of sleep to a face full of sandy, blonde curls.

He's aware, suddenly, of the warm embrace around him; soft skin pressed against his own, strong arms draped lazily across his waist, a hand brushing his back where it dangles off his side. He looks over Billy's sleeping face where he lies against the plush of the pillow, lying on his side, close to Steve's body. He breathes slowly out of softly parted lips, his face calm and serene in sleep. His curls fall across his face and Steve moves slowly to tuck one lock back behind his ear to better see him, doing so as gently as he can so as not to wake the Captain.

Steve's eyes wander greedily, taking in the sight before him. Billy's shirt is gone – his is too he realizes suddenly, they must have thrown them off some time in the night. No wonder, he thinks, with him pressed so close to him, his body is like a furnace, a simmering source of heat that Steve relishes feeling against his skin.

Legs are tangled with his own and he delights in the way he can rise and hook one over Billy's hip with no chain to deter him and he smiles at the way the small movement has Billy's arms holding him closer even in his sleep, pulling him to his chest as he turns to lie on his back, his head to the canopy above and stills.

He seems to still be asleep and Steve is content to let him rest. He leans up a little, just so he can watch the way Billy's chest rises and falls slowly, all that golden skin glowing in the warmth of sleep.

His eyes catch the scar he noticed before – the one that runs from his brow, cuts through the hair and marks part of his eyelid, then continues down his cheek. It's a small and thin white line, curved and jagged near the end, like lightning cutting across the night sky. There's another on the corner of his mouth; a thin, white line splitting through the plush of his lip and down his chin half an inch

or so. Steve's eyes wander around for more, finding another on his other cheek; a small, curved scar – thicker and deeper than the others resting right on his cheekbone.

He raises a hand to it, as gentle as a ripple in still waters he traces over it with the tip of his finger, feeling the puckered flesh, rough against the rest of his smooth skin. More litter his chest, some long lines, some thick and short ones where whatever cut him did so deeper. His eyes wander up his right arm where the scar from Tommy's blade curves around his bicep, red and more recent than the rest, healing well but still raw and new.

He follows the map of Billy's skin back up his neck, to his mouth, his freckle dusted nose and to his eyes which his stomach jolts a little in fright to see are open and watching him.

He smiles down at him, a little bashful at having been caught observing the human so closely. Billy smiles back, eyes lazily blinking up at him, his hand that was rested across his hip had moved when he rolled to his back and touches his arm where it rests across Billy's chest.

"You're a lovely dream to wake up to," Billy says, the voice of his thick and rough and so pleasant to hear.

Steve smiles at him as he comes more awake, his hands roaming where they find themselves resting against Steve's skin tracing soft fingertips across the expanse of his back and stroking a thumb across his forearm. He blinks a few times, sighs and the corners of his lips curl upwards.

"You're still here."

"I was looking at your scars," Steve says, his own voice sounding heavy too and Billy tilts his head in the pillow, a stubborn curl looping across one eye with the movement.

"There's plenty there, you'll be at it all day if you count them all."

Steve chuckles, pushing that curl back out of the pirate's eyes which close at his movements. He tracing the line down his brow to his

cheek and Billy blinks them open again, slowly and looks up at him.

“Where is this one from?”

Billy hums, gaze wandering over Steve’s bare chest and he bites the corner of his lip, “one of my drunken tavern brawls,” he says in a sigh, “some guy pulled a knife on me and nicked me when I wasn’t paying attention.”

“You weren’t paying attention? During a *fight*?”

He shrugs, “I was more than a little intoxicated at the time.”

Steve rolls his eyes and Billy chuckles, his hand tracing little circles on his back.

“Most of them are from silly fights, this one,” he says, sitting up so Steve can lose closely at the one he had been tracing on his other cheek, “that was my first Captain’s ring. He caught me stealing extra food rations and slugged me across the face for it.”

He smiles wryly, “well deserved.”

Billy laughs and Steve doesn’t think he will ever get tired of that sound, “I was too rebellious for my own good then, I’m lucky I never got marooned.”

Steve chuckles, not missing how close Billy has gotten himself to him by leaning up like this. He fights the smug smile when Billy’s hand holds him closer, blue eyes dipping to his mouth and back up again in silent permission.

He wants to laugh at his playfulness, but his mind is slowly fogging with having him so close, unable to ignore the effect this human has on him. His eyes go to those lips and he gives in to the temptation, tilting his head and smiles when Billy immediately meets him in a firm kiss.

Its soft, warm, Billy’s hand on his back flattens against him, tugs him nearer, holds him firmly and that lovely heat curls inside his belly at the low noise the blond makes. He tilts his head for more and Billy chases him, pressing him back into the sheets again and his curls fall

to tickle at his cheeks but Steve wouldn't have it any other way.

Billy is respectful – keeps his lower half away from him, keeps his hands above the waist but even then, he devours Steve like he's dying of thirst and the Siren is an oasis.

He slows it down after a while, looking like it causes him pain to do so when he gives Steve's lips one last, lingering kiss and pulls away. Steve can do nothing but stare up at him breathlessly at the red plush of his mouth, the heavy look in his eyes, the flush that spreads across his chest like ink in water.

"Little Siren," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to his cheek and trailing his lips to his ear in a way that has Steve shuddering and his breeches tightening, "I would devour you, if I could."

His breath is hot and tickles at his ear and his voice is a deep rumble and it thrills him right to his nerve endings. His fingers curl where they hold Billy's waist, blunt nails digging into soft skin and it earns him a nip of teeth on his lobe.

With a heavy sigh that fans cool air across his skin, Billy pulls back, flopping back down onto his back in the sheets. Steve allows himself a moment to calm the heat of his body and his racing heart.

It's not that he doesn't want the blond to go further. If he had his way, Steve would lie here for an age, let Billy do whatever he wanted with him if it meant more of those kisses and soft touches. It's just not in his nature. His kind seek out a mate and only bond when they are sure they are the one for them to live the rest of their lives with. Some go looking forever and some never find them.

He tilts his head and watches Billy smile peacefully up at the canopy, his hand thrown across the small distance between their bodies and holding on to his pinkie, like he needs to keep touching him.

He wonders if Billy could be his one. He never, not once considered it could be a human. He's not even sure if he found his one in a Siren that he would want them more than he wants this man. Just the thought of him being with anyone else – of Billy being with anyone else, it curls a cold darkness in his chest and he wants to banish the

thought entirely.

He wonders if Billy would feel the same or is Steve just a passing fancy for him? Some answer to a riddle of lust that once he has solved, he will move on from. As much as Steve wants, so much to have the human, all of him – he won't. He's had heartbreak before, he's not sure he could do it again, especially when this time he *feels* so much stronger. Everything about Billy is something he likes, something he wants to explore and know like the maps he sees him pour over, know every scar, every blemish, every inch of him inside and out.

A memory comes to him suddenly.

“So...where is the tattoo?”

Billy stiffens and turns his head slowly, looking over to Steve like a child being caught doing something he shouldn't have.

“It was a dare.”

His reluctance only makes Steve grin and raise his intrigue, “where is it?”

He sits up and Billy flinches a little, holding the covers down around his body in a sudden move of shyness. He blinks up at Steve who sits there, patiently waiting with a smile curling his lips.

Billy sighs, “it's on my ass.”

“Excuse me?”

“I had a lot of rum that night -”

“You got a scorpion tattoo...on your rear?”

Billy looks at him, fighting a smile and with pink tinged cheeks, “yes.”

Steve is grinning ear to ear by this point, reaching to tug aside the bed sheets which are still clamped down under Billy's arms.

“Show me.”

“No.”

“You’ve seen me in full fish form.”

“That’s different – that’s natural.”

“I’ll see it at some point anyway,” Steve says, the words out of his mouth before he’s really thought them through. He silently begs Billy not to comment, watches the human still, expression softening before he gives a rather dramatic sigh.

“Fine. A quick look, then I don’t want to hear another word about it.”

Steve just chuckles, watching Billy throw off the sheet and roll onto his stomach, hands fidgeting with the fastenings of his breeches. He wriggles about on the bed and shoves them down to rest just below the globes of his rear. Heat floods Steve’s face, unexpectedly and he is so glad the sight of the tattoo is more than enough to distract him.

He peers down at the smudge of black/blue ink in the shape of what looks like a squashed spider with a curved flick on the end.

“It looks...blurred.”

“I’m pretty sure he was drunk too when he gave me it.”

“Why did you think that would ever be a good idea?” Steve says, unable to hide his laugh as he peers a bit closer, raising a hand to trace a finger across the marking to see if it is raised. To his surprise, it really is ink sunk under the skin, trapped there and very much permanent.

Billy wriggles, “stop it, that tickles.”

That only makes Steve beam, “you are ticklish?”

The pirate glares at him from where he still rests on his front on the mattress, curls falling across his face. Steve opens his mouth to tease him some more but just then they both freeze as the doors fly open, heads turning to see Max standing there.

Her cheeks are flushed and she looks like she is expecting to see anything other than what her eyes are greeted with. She looks from Billy to Steve – her eyes widening in confusion at Steve's presence before she observes the way Billy has his bare ass out for all the world to see and Steve has his hands very close to it about to tickle her half naked Captain. Her mouth drops open in horror.

"I don't want to know."

She slams the doors behind her enough that some objects in the cabin rattle and they sit in shocked silence for a moment before both falling into a fit of laughter.

"She's not going to speak to me for at least three days now."

Billy shakes his head with a smile and rolls his way off the bed, catching himself with a foot on the floor and stands facing the window, stretching his arms above his head. Steve lets his eyes wander down the expanse of his back, across the faint scars marring the flesh, looking at the way toned muscles pull tight and relax, the curve of his spine and the dimples at the base and the swell of his cheeks above the hem of his breeches. He looks away when Billy's arms flop back down to his sides and he moves to tug them back up and lace them. His heart flutters in his chest. It's nothing he hasn't seen before, but it's different now, there is a heavy context to the sight of Billy's skin that makes his nerves spark in his arms and his mouth dry with want.

He bussies himself with finding his shirt and shoving it on, standing and he stumbles a little when blood rushes to his head and stars pop across his vision. He stumbles again, feeling dizzy and catches himself on one of the bed posts.

"Steve? What's wrong?"

Billy swims into his sight, bending to look at his face where he has it rested against the smooth, cool wood.

"I'm okay, I'm just weak. Been out the water too long."

Billy's face grows serious and Steve misses his easy, calm smile when

it is replaced by his usual, thoughtful scowl.

“Let’s get you to outside, then.”

He puts gentle arms around Steve and he’s jittery and anxious for a whole different reason now. Billy leads him slowly to the cabin doors and he’s doing it, he’s really going to let him go, he’s going to be back in the water at last.

The light is blinding when they emerge and his stomach turns as pain throbs in his head. His skin feels tight and like it’s too dry in the heat and if it weren’t for Billy’s steady hold on him he might have dropped to his knees.

Crew look to him, he can’t quite see their faces, his vision is still blurred and loopy but he feels the quiet in them, seeing him without his chain and with Billy holding him gentle and concerned. He wonders if Max had told them he was being let go. He wonders if Billy decided while at the tavern last night and shared his plan. Maybe it is just a surprise to them all now as it had been last night for him. He keeps his eyes to the floor and focuses on putting one foot before the other. He isn’t sure how they will react. He was a cash prize for them all, even if it wasn’t with an armada in mind, it sounded like he would have given them plenty of coin to line their pockets as well as provide the arms Billy needs.

He wonders if a few of them resent him for this. What if they try to stop him? What if they call a mutiny against Billy for the betrayal? What if this is some cruel trick? He knows Billy is sincere but what about the rest of them? He may be their Captain but he is just one man against a crew of many who are expected to watch their treasure get set loose.

His heart is thundering in his chest and he can’t breathe right and he’s trying to blink past the brightness of the sun to watch the crew and make sure none of them take advantage of him like this and try to keep him.

“Here, Steve, here,” a voice says to his left and he turns to see Dustin there, holding on to his arm and bringing it to the wooden railings. He sets his palm flat on the polished wood and Steve leans forwards a

little and he can see it; the sparkling, aqua blue of the ocean, glittering in the sun and beckoning him to return to its embrace.

He breathes deep, focuses on where Billy's heavy palm is rubbing sure and steady against his back and he raises his head, his vision adjusting to the glare of the sun and he can focus on the crew behind him. Some are keeping to their tasks but not looking like they are resentful or ready to spring. The ones who are looking are doing so in concern.

"You okay, Steve?" Robin says softly, stepping forwards as Steve lets himself lean back against the railings, head clearing as he breathes in the air and his anxiety calms a bit.

He nods, feeling a little foolish, clear eyes seeing nothing but friends around him.

"I'm fine, I'm okay."

"You're not going to keel over before you get to the water, are you?" Max asks in her usual gruff way but her eyes are full of worry, her brow creased as she watches him chuckle.

"No, just a dizzy spell," he says.

"Are you ready?"

He turns to Billy's voice, the blond standing there, shining in the sun. His face is drawn and he gives Steve a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes. Steve wants to push that sombre look away from his face and have him smiling again. He wants to tell him he's not leaving yet – but if not now, then when? He's told him he's leaving – Billy's told him he's letting him go. He needs the water, he has been away from his people too long, but he just doesn't want to say goodbye yet. He's always hated goodbyes.

He turns away, looks down at the water and moves to where the plank Tommy walked was, the wooden board is gone but the gap in the railings is there, open and inviting and the water is so close, just a leap away.

His body thrums with need, his very blood rushing in his veins where

the water sings to him to return to it. He peels off his shirt, Billy's hands assisting him when the fabric catches around his head and when he's free of it, Billy sets anxious hands to folding the material haphazardly.

"Do you need us to lower you down -"

Steve doesn't hear the rest of whatever Billy is saying, he's out of his clothes and he's diving off the side and he's airborne for a moment then he's crashing through the surface, surrounded by crisp, clean, soothing water and he feels better than he has in days.

He lets himself sink down, the change coming over him slowly after days being out of the water. His eyes are usually first; the film flicking over and he looks around at the expanse of blue all around. He can look down and watch as his legs move together, skin threading into a smooth tail and his scales rising and shining in the rays that pierce through the water. His hands web together, his gills slitting across his neck and the sides of his chest and he breathes in the water, feeling it like a cool wave over heated skin. His fins wave lazily as they form and he moves his tail slowly back and forth as he floats down, getting used to his movements again.

He gives a sharp kick and he powers through the water, another and another and he's swimming, cutting through the endless blue and his muscles sing with use, his body thrills at the water all around and in him. He turns, looks back to where he can see the bottom of *The Scorpion* bobbing in the water, further away than he thought, not even realising how far he had swum already.

He grins, turns and propels himself back. When he nears, he flicks his tail hard and he shoots out of the water, back into the air and bends back to dive back in again. He does it again and again, skipping his way through the surface and curving his way around the bow of the boat. He glances up and laughs when he sees the shapes of the crew running around on deck, following him around as he comes back to where he jumped in.

He dives back in one more time and sinks low, down until the water cools, further away from the heat of the sun then kicks again in one, powerful move he shoots back up to the surface, head breaking

through and blinking in the sun.

He shakes the water from his hair and the films of his eyes flick back, adjusting slowly until he can look up and see Billy grinning down at him, the sun making his curls shine around his head. Dustin and the rest are crowded around him, all craning to see and he laughs when Billy bats them away.

“At least some of you pretend you are working, at this rate you’re going to tip us into the sea.”

“Billy – he’s so cool!”

Dustin bounces up and down, grabbing onto Billy’s arm and jiggling him in his excitement and it just makes Steve laugh more.

He tilts himself backwards, lets his tail dip in and out of the water, his scales catching the sun and shining brilliantly like diamonds. Dustin gawks at him and tugs his notebook out of his jacket pocket and furiously turns the pages, finding himself somewhere to sit on the quarterdeck and begins scribbling down notes and drawings and Gods know what else.

Steve kicks himself closer to the edge of the boat; huge and imposing and Billy appears at the edge where Steve has jumped from. He plops himself down, bare feet dangling off the edge and smiles down at Steve fondly.

“I thought you had just shot off and gone,” he calls down, wiping some sweat away from his brow.

Steve kicks backwards to see him better, “you should come in, the water feels amazing.”

Billy shakes his head, hand holding on to the wooden posts either side of him, “I can’t swim, remember.”

Steve rolls his eyes with a grin, “how did you survive in the Navy if you don’t know how to swim.”

“I know you haven’t had much experience with Navy ships but usually the goal is to stay on them and not in the water.”

He laughs, Billy grinning back at him and Steve wants, he wants so much to share this with him, he wants Billy to feel how incredible the water can be and how freeing it is to be surrounded by endless space and floating like you're flying above the clouds.

"I'll take care of you, I won't let you drown, I promise."

Billy looks at him for a long moment, smiling softly, eyes seeming to reflect the sparkle of the sun on the water. He sighs dramatically and leans back, kicking his legs up and disappears from sight.

Steve sobers for a moment, looking for movement, worrying he's pushed too hard for something he isn't ready for. He hears thudding of bare feet on the deck and Billy reappears, running towards the edge and Steve's eyes widen and his mouth spreads into a grin.

Max was right; he really is too impulsive for his own good.

Steve kicks back, ready to watch where he hits the water and make sure he can hold him if he panics.

Billy stutters to a stop right at the edge, catching himself with an iron grip on the posts and looks down at Steve with wide eyes.

"I chickened out," he says.

Steve opens his mouth to tease him, but then Max and Heather appear behind him and give him a hard shove. Billy yelps and flails as he is shoved over the edge and he hits the water with a less than graceful plunk.

He resurfaces almost immediately, his hair soaked and sticking to half of his face and he shakes it out of his eyes, glaring up at the deck where half the crew grin down at him.

"I'll maroon the lot of you!"

They laugh, Max the loudest of all, "yeah, good luck with that when you're the one overboard," she teases, turning to return to her tasks, taking the lead in Billy's stead.

Steve kicks over to where Billy is kicking a little too hard and

struggling to keep afloat. He catches him around the waist and flicks his tail down in little movements that hold Billy up, his neck and part of his chest safely out of the water.

Billy holds on to him, looking at him a little bashfully. Steve's eyes roam over him, waiting curiously to see any difference in him. He just looks like the same old Billy; all human and very wet.

"I honestly expected you to grow a tail."

Billy rolls his eyes, "I've been in the sea before, I'm not a complete fraud. I just prefer not to be in it too long., I don't like my head below the water."

"Would you try? Just for a moment, I'll hold you all the while."

Billy sighs, peers down between their bodies at the water warily. Steve's tail kicks to and fro, keeping him up and Billy lets himself float in his hold.

"A moment and if I struggle I want up immediately."

Steve nods seriously, moves to hold Billy's hands and the human flounders a little before seeing that Steve is still holding him up.

"Try to keep your eyes open, it will just be blurry but it will keep you orientated," Billy nods, listening to his instructions, hands gripping on to him, "if you struggle, I'll bring you up, take a deep breath."

Billy blows out a breath then takes a deep one, does it again and on the inhale he looks at Steve and nods.

Steve flattens his tail and uses his gills at his sides to pull himself under, Billy following, sinking down into the surface and clings on to Steve's wrists when his webbing make it hard to hold his hands.

Steve's eyes flick, the film coating them and he can see Billy as they float just below the surface. The human has his mouth clamped shut, holding the air in his lungs and his eyes are wide as he looks around, unseeing but does as Steve had instructed. His hair floats around him like the grass weeds at the bottom of the ocean, floating around him lazily in the water's hold. It looks longer this way, catching the sun

that shines through the surface.

Steve watches him closely, Billy looks back and then his heart leaps in his chest when a film flicks and moves across the human's eyes. Billy stills, wide eyes and clear vision and they focus on Steve and they both just stare at one another for a beat.

Then there are slits forming on the side of his neck, openings that flap in the water and Billy's mouth shoots open in a panic and the human struggles, kicks and lets go of Steve's wrists.

Steve immediately shoots into action, grabbing Billy's shirt where it floats around his form and kicks his tail, soaring up the small space between them and the surface. He holds Billy up as the blond coughs and splutters, the slits on the sides of his necks fluttering with it.

"What – what was that?"

"You have gills!"

Billy looks at him with wide, shocked eyes, his mouth hanging open.

"I – I could see you suddenly – I could see clear and I could feel – I didn't feel like I was struggling for breath anymore and I just – I opened my mouth and -"

"You panicked," Steve tells him calmly, watching the way Billy's chest heaves as he tries to take a breath, his gills still there as his neck dips in and out of the surface of the water. He reaches out, not really thinking and traces the back of his fingers across them, keeping his short claws away and Billy flinches, shoots wide eyes at him and his own hand flies to the spot.

"What does it feel like?"

"I don't – I don't know," Billy says, licking some water drops away from his lips, "I feel like – I mean, I'm breathing, like usual but at the same time it's like – it's like I need to inhale deep and, I don't know."

Steve nods, thinking of how he taught the younglings when he helped Chief with their first surfacing.

“It’s difficult at first, going from human breathing to Siren breathing. Your natural instincts conflict – you want to keep your mouth closed but at the same time you want to breathe the water in.”

Billy nods, looking at the water and he’s still touching the slits with gentle hands.

“Do you want to try again?” he asks gently, gauging Billy’s mood.

The blond holds on to him, assessing the water and eventually he nods.

“Maybe once more just – just to see how it works.”

Steve moves to face him again, lets Billy take his wrists and the man looks at him with such determination but vulnerability, fear in his eyes and Steve wants so much for this to be a good experience for him. He waits for Billy to meet his gaze.

“Just like before: take a deep breath, don’t panic, I’m right here. Just open your eyes and when it feels right – I know it will seem like the opposite of what you would usually do – but just open your mouth and let the water in and try taking a breath, okay?”

Billy takes his deep breaths and Steve waits for him to give him his consent. The blond takes three more breaths before meeting Steve’s eyes and nodding on an inhale before clamping his mouth shut.

Steve does the same again, lets them float under the surface and watches as Billy’s eyes focus on him and can see him clearly. Steve opens his own mouth, showing Billy how he naturally does it and the Captain hesitates, then slowly copies him. Steve can see his tongue clamped down against his throat where he still holds his breath and he nods to him, takes his own breath of water and feels his gills flutter as they expel it in a breath.

Billy struggles for a moment before taking in a sharp inhale. His gills flutter, he thrashes his legs a bit and Steve gets ready to pull him back up but then he stills. He watches as he takes another gulping breath, then another, the slits in his neck fanning out and Billy is wide eyed and terrified but he’s grinning and looking completely

shocked and amazed.

He kicks, grabs on to Steve's wrists and the Siren immediately shoots them back up to the surface,

Billy coughs and splutters, clinging to Steve and looks to the ship bobbing about a little ways away from them.

"Lower a boat," he shouts up and Steve hears some crew scramble about to do his bidding. A loud creak a few shouts later, one of the rowboats slowly begins its decent down the side of the ship, moving in slow, jerky movements on old ropes. Steve floats them closer to it and Billy lets him go.

The boat sinks into the water surprisingly gently and Billy kicks his way over, grunting as he braces his arms on the side and it tilts towards him as he pulls himself in. The blond flops down on his belly in the boat then rolls to his back, Steve just seeing his legs sticking out over the side before he sits up and tucks them into the safety of the vessel.

"Better?"

The blond nods, face serious, hands searching at his neck but the gills are already forming back into smooth skin. His eyes flicker between slitted pupils and round as his panic subsides and he calms himself. He looks at Steve, chest heaving and the Siren just holds on to the side of the boat and waits.

"That's never happened before."

Steve shrugs, holding on to the side of the raft and lets himself float in the water. Billy sits, still panting a little, still a little freaked out at this revelation.

"You've never been in the water enough for a change to happen properly".

"Half a change. I don't have a tail."

"Well, you're only half Siren – I need to start referring you as half-human," he jokes, hoping to lighten the mood a little.

It works; Billy gives a small chuckle, “hey, not quite ready for that conversation quite yet.”

He lets Billy catch his breath.

“I should have known sooner,” he says, more to himself, “you have this aura about you. My scales are iridescent, you can see it in my skin when I’m human, that shimmer that lingers,” he flicks his tail up to ripple against the surface, Billy’s eyes following his movement, listening to each of his words intently.

He sinks his tail back under and turns to him again, “you have it too. You’re all gold, like the sun lives in your skin. Like this,” he says, pressing a finger to the skin next to the scale hanging around the blond’s neck.

Billy thinks for a moment, hand coming to join Steve’s, rubbing against the scale that is worn blunt at the edges, years of his fingers tracing over it to wear it down.

“I always thought I was like her,” he says slowly, eyes on the water, “he told me nothing about her. I looked nothing like him, I didn’t share any interests, any of his ambition. For a while, I tried so hard to be just like him, to love what he loved and hate what he hates.”

He gives a wry smile, shaking his head and meeting Steve’s gaze, “I wound up being his exact opposite.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” Steve says carefully, “you – just the way you are, I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Billy gives him a soft look. Not a smile, not a grin, just soft. Half lidded eyes and blinking slowly.

Steve leans to rest his arms on the edge of the boat, setting his head down on them and peering up at Billy tail flicking lazily out behind him.

“I always resented my parents for leaving me, that we weren’t enough for them to stay. When I grew, I started understanding them more. I love my home, I love my people, but I always wanted more. Not to live in a town with humans – not like that. I just wanted to see

more. More water, more places, to keep going from land to sea and get to know it all.”

Billy smirks at him, tilting his head, “like a Pirate?”

Steve chuckles, but he looks away, watches the water droplets fall from the ends of Billy’s curls, “I don’t know if I went back that I would be content to stay.”

Billy reaches out, rests a hand on his bent arm, “if you want to see more, you could come ashore with us. Max talked of making port and selling off some of our findings. There’s an island on course. It used to be a Pirate stronghold but now it’s sort of a nomad land – neutral territory. No Navy or Pirates have any claim there. There’s a market and you could come and see it. If you wanted to.”

Steve smiles wryly, “it sounds like you’re trying to get me to stay longer.”

Billy’s eyes widen, “you will be free to go any time you want, no chains, nothing. It will just be me and a few of the crew. The market is right on the shore – you can leave any time -”

“- I’m joking, Billy, I know I can go whenever I want.”

Billy relaxes a little, sitting back in the rocking boat, “it’s a bit of a scummy place – for the lowest of the low. Pirates and the like. Black market and stuff, maybe it’s not as appealing as I’m trying to make it sound.”

Steve’s chest warms, he wants to kiss him. The way he wants to show Steve the good side of human life – just like how Steve got to show him the wonders of being Siren. A few more hours, a day or so more, it couldn’t hurt, it wouldn’t change much.

“I want to see it,” he says, Billy turning hopeful eyes to him, “I want you to show me it.”

The Captain beams at him, leans forwards and Steve cranes his neck eagerly to accept the small, soft kiss.

He's not sure if Billy has talked to Max or the rest of the crew about his newfound abilities. They know, after their fight that Billy is not entirely human. None of them treat him any different, Steve would be able to easily believe none of them knew anything at all.

They returned to the boat and once they were dressed and back to normal, they made ready to sail for their destination.

Steve was allowed to help out on deck. He didn't mind, rather, he relished it. Days of sitting idly, of feeling like some package on the side of the deck and only watching things come and go were past him now and he could not be more grateful.

He enjoyed learning more about the workings of the ship. It was one thing to observe, quite another to be involved in the ways of the ship and seeing how each one of them lending their hands to tasks got the place running like a well oiled machine.

Billy stays at the helm for most of the day, Dustin thrusting papers and maps and his calculations at him which Billy takes with a small air of annoyance. He's learned that Dustin's role is navigator and he does the little calculations to work out journeys and directions and other things Steve doesn't really understand but knows is impressive. Billy catches his eye over the curly haired boy's head once and gave him a secret, knowing smile that had Steve turning away, a grin of his own pulling at his mouth.

He works with Robin for most of the time, helping her and Heather below deck in one of the storage rooms to sort out what they would be taking to the market to either barter with or sell. He is surprised to see they have everything on board counted and recorded on their papers. He always imagined the ships to be stuffed with treasure and whatever belongings and hoard they had stolen, a haphazard mess of

stolen findings they helped themselves to at their leisure. He is surprised to learn there is a system to it all. Each man has an equal share, Max as Bosun gets slightly more and Billy getting double. He learns that each crew works on specific shifts and have a fair amount of time to rest below deck. Men with injuries – such as Charlie – get a bonus share for their trouble. Those that are infirm, cripple or too weak to put a full effort in get slightly less and less workload to be responsible for. Even the crew that play their instruments on deck get a day off in a week and usually get first share of food and drink so they can perform while the others eat.

Its all so much more organised than he ever expected and he is impressed with the system of it all. Robin explains that most Pirates go by a similar system but at the end of the day, Billy has the biggest say, but he is fair and democratic in general affairs and only makes his own decisions where his crew are concerned for business that is more pressing and specific to a Captain's experience.

When they finally near port, they have assembled the wares to be brought to market on deck and the man posted in the Crow's Nest gives the call for land and they all move to make ready for port. This, Steve is happy to remain out of, watching the crew come and go, moving quick and efficient, Billy steering with concentration to bring the ship to it's place in the harbor.

A gangplank is laid for them and he helps carry a box of bottles that is to be sold at the market, the rest of those going ashore wheeling barrels and carrying crates with them. Its much more civilized than he thought and he is still looking about in wonder when Billy appears by his side; hat on his head, coat on and looking every inch a Captain in charge.

He winks at Steve and picks up a crate of his own and leads him down the wooden board to the pier below.

They leave the wares with Robin and the small amount of crew to handle at the market – her specialty job, Billy informs him as he leads him towards the harbor.

“She's the best at bartering, always gets us a good deal – I'm too hot headed for it, I always cause a fight.”

Steve chuckles, wriggling his toes in the boots he has been given to wear that feel a little too loose but not enough to bother him, just a little strange to wear them on his usually bear feet.

“Why does that not surprise me.”

Billy gives him a grin and takes his elbow, leading him out of the way of a passing herd of goats as they are led by a man aboard a ship set further down the pier.

The sounds of the town reach him as they near. The Island is the biggest he’s seen so far; a sandy beach with countless taverns and houses crowded around, a thick jungle behind and mountains towering over them in the back. The land curves around like a huge crescent moon, the ships coming through the two points. The bay is bigger than he expects with many ships of all shapes and sizes at docks along the curve of the shore.

“What would you like to see first?” Billy says with a grin, walking backwards, facing Steve who worries for his footing, but the blond seems to know the boards well, “Pirates? Privateers? Thieves? Prostitutes? One or two Drunkards?”

Steve bats him until he turns around again, walking by the Siren’s side, shoulder bumping, hands brushing together every so often.

“I am curious about these Taverns you humans seem so fond of.”

Billy beams in the lazy afternoon light, tipping his hat to him and throwing an arm over his shoulders, “Then the *Twelve Daggers* is our first calling.”

The place in question is a small building in the heart of the town. They hear it before they see it; its windows lit with warm lantern glow, music playing from within, men and women laughing and shouting and bodies coming and going everywhere. There is a wide archway as its entrance with twelve daggers decorated in a circle at the top. Billy leads him in, all bravado and swagger. Some recognize him here and there; some give him cheers and shout out greetings, some raising their mugs of ale and wine to him, other give him wary, almost worried looks, some look ready to start a fight.

Steve follows along behind, suddenly a little nervous at the mass of humans around him and the looks Billy receives. He wants to reach out and hold on to him, but thinks better of it. He's glad that under the low lighting his skin won't look quite so Siren-like, but still, his eyes dark around to every corner and every body as Billy leads him to a small booth in the back, below one of the landings.

"Relax, Stevie, I'm on my good behavior, no fights or gambling or anything tonight, you're safe, I swear," Billy says when they are seated and he notices Steve's nervous glancing about. Steve gives him a stiff smile and Billy shifts in his seat. Steve feels the touch of his booted foot against his, Billy hooking his ankle between his own and it relaxes him a bit, makes him feel more grounded and more connected to Billy.

He gives him a grateful smile and Billy returns it, shuffles a little closer.

"If you want to leave, say, any time."

"I'm fine – I've just never been so immersed in humans like this."

Billy rubs the side of his foot up and down Steve's ankle slowly, "think of it this way: you're getting the perfect backseat view of human life. It's scummy, Pirate life, but you get to see it."

Steve looks about, realizing Billy is right. He has tucked them away in the back out of sight of those that gave him disdainful looks before, but none of them are directed at Steve. He has no reputation here, he's a nobody and no one is bothered by him. He gets to sit and watch all the goings on.

The place is bigger than he expected; higher ceilings and stairs that lead up to floors higher up where more occupants drink and cheer. There are gambling tables near the balconies up there, he recognizes some of the games he's seen the crew play, only these men wager money and trinkets where Billy's crew usually gamble rations or tasks. Music plays loud and merry from the back of the room where a group sitting with instruments are on a stage. There are women with painted faces and brightly colored dresses on that show off the swell of their breasts and the stockings on their legs. Some men catch them

by their waists and hold them in their laps, the women laughing and seeming to enjoy the attention, others take coins from the men and lead them off to some dark place and Steve doesn't need to stretch the imagination to know what they are doing.

Some Women are dressed more modestly in linens and aprons, they come and go refilling flagons, laughing and joking with some of the patrons but otherwise going about their work – presumably employed at the establishment. Most are sitting drinking, some roaring with laughter, some singing to the music, some dancing, some stumbling about, some hanging off the balconies above and some running around like children at play. The place is *alive* with so much life, such diversity of people from ages to race to gender to creed. Its incredible, he realizes, so much activity and so very *human*.

He turns to Billy who is watching him fondly, raises his eyebrows in question to which he nods. Yes, he is enjoying himself.

They share a flagon of ale. Its bitter and Steve doesn't like it at first but after a few sips, he gets used to it. It fizzes and foam coats his lip with every sip he takes but it is rich and heady and different from the spiced wine he's gotten used to.

The place never seems to quiet. Billy shouts to him over the music and the noise. He tells him about the patrons there he knows – points out some Captains and their crew. He knows a few of the women by name and he gives Steve a sly smile when he teases him for it. He spots Heather and Robin among the throng, having been done with their business at the market. They cheer him across the way but remain where they are with a small group they seem to know well.

“This is where we picked up Heather from,” Billy says, leaning close, Steve can smell the ale on him and the musk of his sweat and his head is swimming slightly from the drink and the buzz and Billy suddenly coming close to him. He has thrown an arm over the back of Steve's chair and Steve leans in to him, wanting to climb into his lap and nuzzle into his embrace.

“They are some of her old friends, she visits them when she can – I think one is her cousin or something, he gives her gifts her parents send her, letters and such.”

Billy's eyes gleam, Steve is listening to him, he really is, but he's loose and happy from the atmosphere and the ale and he's really enjoying himself and being with Billy and feeling freer than he has his whole life.

Billy ducks his head, smiling at him knowingly, "come on, little Siren, let's get you fresh air, more to see."

He lets Billy lead him back out the place, passing through the throng of the folk, half of them drunk silly. They push through the crowd and when they burst out into the fresh air of the evening, he breathes it deep and Billy returns his arm around his shoulder.

"I want to show you the market – you can buy anything imaginable there, I think you'll enjoy it."

The Market is a series of stalls on the sand of the beach, running all along the harbor. The place is just a lively; people coming and going from stall to stall. Each is decorated with wares of all kinds; huge sacks filled to the brim with dried leaves and spices and herbs that Steve could not even name. There are pens containing goats and cows and other livestock for purchase, stalls laden with trinkets and findings - mostly stolen or fakes. Fruits of every kind and many that he had never seen before, huge pots on open fires containing food and mulled wines that have him salivating at the idea of and if he hadn't already had his fill of food on ship before coming here, he would have asked Billy to buy him a bowl.

They pass by a stall with woven blankets and shawls past the pens with the animals to where the market stalls titter off and there is a small crowd gathered. Steve is shining in the brilliance of it all, imagining walking here day after day and never getting to see everything there. He turns to Billy but his spirits dampen at the hard look on the Captain's face.

He's not looking at Steve, his eyes are fixated on the crowd gathered at the end of the market and his top lip twitches in disgust.

"What is it?" Steve asks warily, hoping it to be some performance art or poorly executed opera group that Lucas told him about.

“Slave Market.”

Steve’s blood runs cold at the words, spoken with a level of disdain. He follows Billy’s gaze as they near, keeping to the back of the crows which moves and through a parting, Steve can see a number of finely dressed Merchants standing about, taking turns to shout out descriptions of their wares.

They were all small, scrawny people, each of them just younglings. There must have been around ten of them in all, stood huddled together, shackled at their wrists and ankles, peering around with wide, frightened eyes.

“Slaves for sale,” one of the Merchants bellows at the crows, tugging the line of children along, “fine specimens hard workers for any ship or home, a fair price!”

Steve’s stomach turns as he looks over them one by one, his heart contracting at the sight of them looking so scared and so alone. His eyes fall upon the girl at the end of the line and his stomach drops to his knees.

“El.”

Wide eyes met his in a muddy face, brunette hair wild and untidy and she looks even more tiny than he remembers her. She opens her mouth as if to call him over when her eyes meet his, then she pauses, looking fearfully to the Merchant and shutting her mouth again. She keeps her head down as another man swats at her head but her eyes are wide and pleading upon him through the throng of the crowd.

Steve is lost in the shock of seeing her there and is broken out of his reverie by a small nudge at his side, turning to see Billy looking at him, face contorted in concern.

“Steve? You alright?”

“I know her,” he says in a rush, voice hushed and not really realizing what he is saying.

“Her? Who are you talking about?”

He clings to the fabric of Billy's sleeve with shaking fingers, unable to take his eyes away from El. His voice is no more than a hoarse whisper.

"The slave, I know her she – she's one of my kind."

He is shaking, El is being tugged along by the Merchant and she struggled then is struck again. She keeps her chin up, blood trickling down her cheek where one of the Merchant's many rings have cut her.

Billy grabs his arm, not ungently and pulls him close, murmuring urgently in his ear.

"Which one is she?"

Steve's voice doesn't seem to be working. His mouth opens and closes and no sound comes out. He keeps staring at her chained up like that, unable to comprehend little El being there, being here, on this Island of all places just when he is.

"Damn you, Steve, tell me quickly," Billy hisses, fingers holding his arm tighter and shaking him once to break him out of his reverie.

"The girl. The brunette standing to the end on the right."

Billy turns on his heel without another word and stalks over to the Merchant.

El's eyes dart between them as they speak, then to Steve questioningly. He tries to tell her with his eyes that it's okay, Billy is a friend and he's going to help her.

He watches Billy stiff shouldered and clearly brimming with anger as he barter with the Merchant. Steve's lip curls, the scum doesn't deserve any coin for this. This barbaric trade. He wants to lash out and cut them from their chains and free them ,let them go back to wherever they came from and scream at the crowd gathered for willingly bartering for the lives and services of children.

The Merchant nods his head to Billy and turns, signals to another man who hurries over and unchains El from the line. Her hands are

still bound before her as she is brought to Billy who ignores the Merchant's thanks for his purchase and turns, laying a gentle hand on El's shoulder and steering her through the crowd to Steve.

She hurries when she sees him, stumbling on weak legs and he bends to catch her as she falls upon nearing him, crashing her little body into his. Steve feels himself choke on the lump in his throat, tears blurring his vision and he clings to El, uncaring of the curious eyes around them.

Billy lends them his protection, turning his back to the crowd and spreading his arms around them as if to herd them off, his coat fanning out with the movement to hide them from prying eyes.

"Steve, we need to get her back to the ship," he says urgently and lowly, "they didn't realize she is Siren – if they find out the place will be in an uproar."

If El is surprised at Billy's knowledge of her status, she doesn't show it, just straightens, tears leading tracks through the mud on her face and lets Billy herd them out. Steve clings on to her, holding on to the dirty linen she wears, covering her tiny frame. When they are out of the crowd and back to the markets he pulls her to the side and hurriedly unties her bonds.

"El, Gods, El, how are you here?"

He's crying now, looking at her shivering where she stands, "followed you," she says, her grip on the human tongue poor and unpracticed, "I got caught in a net – that man, bad man, he took me to sell."

She jerks a glare over her shoulder to the Merchant's crows and Steve tosses the ropes to the floor and kneels to her level.

"You were following me?"

She nods, shivering again and Billy immediately tugs off his coat and drapes it across her little frame. She flinches, turning wary eyes to the blond but Steve waves her away.

"It's okay, EL – this is Billy, he's a friend."

El looks up at the Captain for a time, brown eyes boring into him and the blond stands there calmly, awaiting her ascension. She nods, turns away and pulls the coat around her, sliding their arms into the long sleeves.

“I see him, he is good.”

Billy looks momentarily confused but Steve doesn't have time right now to explain this Siren-daughter and her abilities to look into the places between the lines of the word and know things.

“Billy has a ship, it will take us away from here, we will take you back home, we'll go now, okay?”

She nods and takes his offered hand, Billy taking up the other side of her and leads them through the market. They hurry, El flinching at the loud noises and bursts of fire from the food stalls and the noises and activity all around. Steve's got no idea how long she had been caught for nor how many humans she has seen beyond that. Everything is probably so overwhelming to her and he just needs to get her on the ship and in Billy's cabin where he can make sure she is okay and look after her.

“Billy! Captain!”

They look up to see Dustin, and Lucas, running through the crowds to him, their faces drawn with worry.

“Billy, The Man of Modine is here, Charlie and Scully saw him near Bowdash.”

Billy's face pales. His eyes harden and his hand goes to the hilt of his sword.

“What was he doing?”

Dustin shakes his head, “trading, from what they could see – but its *Modine*, we're all sitting time bombs here.”

“Who is the Man of Modine?” Steve asks, frowning at the faces of worry and fear before him.

Billy tugs Steve to the middle of their small group, El following and his eyes dart around the place.

“Shut up and stay close to me.”

Steve looks at him wide eyes, holds El closer to him, he’s never seen Billy like this before, “you’re afraid.”

Billy nods, their small group moving back towards the harbor where *The Scorpion* sits waiting at the end of the pier, “with good reason.”

“Who is he – a Pirate?”

Lucas shakes his head, looking around like Billy for something lurking in among the people all around, “no, something worse. He’s a man of the King’s armada – one of the highest in the ranks. One of Admiral Hargrove’s best friends.”

“Who?”

“My Father,” Billy spits.

“Steve’s blood runs cold, “so he’s after you too?”

Billy nods, “he’s after everyone under the colors – he *was* pirate, turned Privateer. He’s been commissioned by the King to assist in wiping out Pirates. More than that, he’s famous for hunting Siren kind.”

“Sirens?”

“In his Pirate days he killed hoards of them, found their hiding places and used canon to destroy them, those that made it out he massacred in the water or caught and killed on board.”

El flinches and Steve’s stomach turns and he feels sick. They reach the pier at long last and find Charlie and Scully there, hands on their weapons, looking every bit as jittery as their small crowd does. Scully frowns down at El, “Cap, you bought a *slave*?”

His voice is full of skepticism and it would please Steve to know that Billy does not deal in these affairs but right now Billy is tutting and

waving the question away, “not now, Scully – later. Where is Heather and Robin?”

The man shrugs, “still on shore, last I saw her she was leaving the tavern to go to the cove.”

Billy curses but the sound is drowned out by a large noise like a booming pop coming from deeper in the town. They turn to see commotion all around, people running and more crackling pops that Steve recognises as gunfire. Women scream and men shout and then Steve can see Heather and Robin running towards the through the throng of commotion.

“Modine set a fire in the Taverns – he’s firing on the whole place – we need to go!”

Behind her, through gunshots and a huge blaze of fire that erupts from seemingly thin air, men in military uniforms come charging through. They branch off in groups, shooting down anyone running about, anyone at all. A group come charging towards them and Steve sees a man in a more intricate uniform, a white wig adorns his head and a large Captain’s hat with feathers and plumes streaking out the back of it. He is tall and thin and looks middle aged by human standards. He is calm as he walks, holds a pistol in hand, looking around almost bored as his men carry out his business.

Stalls are rampaged and turned over, men and women alike gunned down and their wares set ablaze to. Pirate kind everywhere is massacred before Steve’s eyes and all he can do is stare in horror.

The white-haired man fixes his eyes on their group just as Billy ducks from a hoard of women running past him. He straightens and turns his head and the two lock eyes. Steve watches as Modine’s calm features wash away and a seething, excited rage takes over and he barks out a command that has men kneeling and standing around him, long guns raising to take aim.

“TAKE COVER!” Scully screeches and the lot of them dash behind whatever they can; stacked crates waiting to board ships, barrels and the like. Billy turns and grabs Steve and El and hauls them to the side behind the shelter of heavy wooden boxes stacked as gunfire rings

out around.

“GET BACK TO THE SHIP!” he bellows, clinging to Steve and watches as Robin and Charlie pull out their guns and return fire. Scully and Heather join them and as they cover them, Billy hauls Steve and El back up and rushes them further down the pier towards *The Scorpion* which sits on the end.

Shots ring out over their heads and the air is filled with it and screaming and smoke from the fires and Billy shoves them back to cover behind a small sailing vessel as shots ring out again and Heather and the rest catch up to them.

“Get them on board,” Billy says in a firm voice to Heather. Steve hesitates for a moment but Billy’s face tells him there is no room for arguments and El is still clinging to him and he is so hopelessly unarmed. He bends, hauls El into his arms and follows Heather’s lead as she runs back to the ship, Billy and his crew returning fire against Modine’s men.

They scramble up the gangplank, crew on board already rushing about to get ready for sail, other ships in the harbor already setting off, one near the bay completely up in flames, another next to it sinking into the water.

Steve crashes into the cabin and sets El down on the bed, tugging a blanket over her and cupping her face to make her look up at him, “stay here, stay low – you’ll be safe, I have to help.”

She grabs him, “I can help too!”

“No, El, please, just stay here,” Steve says firmly and leaves only when she nods her head. He slams the doors shut behind her and turns to find where he can be useful.

Robin and Dustin are running up the gangplank, Scully and Charlie following close behind and his stomach lurches in relief to see Billy scramble up after them, turning to kick the gangplank into the water as the boat gives a lurch and pulls away from the harbor.

“GET UNDERWAY, HASTE!” Billy roars, blood trickling down the

side of his head and some staining his shirt. His eyes soften when he sees Steve but he knows this is no time to pause, "Help Jack hoist sails, we need out of here fast," he says, squeezing Steve's arm and running up the steps to the helm where Dustin is already setting course.

Steve scrambles up the mast, Jack offering him an arm and hoisting him up where he helps untie the thick ropes that hold the sails. The swaths of fabric thunder as they unfurl and he hurries back down to help secure them as the boat turns its way out of the port.

He leans over the side and the pier is no more than half a mile away and they still have so much more of a ways to go until they are out of the bay alone never mind away from the island. He can't see Modine among the thrall, the men that followed them to the ship had since disperse in their retreat and seem to have returned their attentions to the town. The place is a blaze, stalls destroyed and the things that had so fascinated Steve all up in a blaze or trodden in to the ground.

The cluster of houses and buildings that make up the town are all ablaze, the fires high and burning the night sky orange, smoke chocking the air. People still rush about, so many lie still and unmoving on the ground and Steve has to turn away from the sight, his stomach turning, rage coursing through him as his eyes narrow.

The boat is going too slow. They aren't going to make it out the bay and if they do, they still have to get away from the island itself. Other boats in front of them fight to get through the gap of the crescent and he looks about at a loss for what to do.

A call rings out from the nest above and Steve looks to where everyone's heads have turned to see imperial looking ships sailing from the corner of the bay right to them. The main ship is huge, rows of canon line either side, it flies what he knows is the King's flag and he doesn't need anyone to tell him that its Modine's ship, and its turning and coming right for them.

He scrambles up to the helm where Billy is barking out orders, steering the ship along, but the wind is too low and the sails are half full and the boat is going to catch up to them.

“Billy -” he says in a quiet voice, not wanting to point out the obvious but unsure of what to do.

“I know, Steve,” he says, his eyes on the sails, on the crew, ahead, Dustin muttering little things to him every now and then as he frantically flicks through his notes. He still has blood running down his face but he doesn’t seem to notice it, flicks his curls out of his eyes and scowls ahead.

“Should we ready the canons, Captain?” Max asks from his side quietly, her face drawn and serious and looking so much like her brother.

“No use, he’s got thrice the number. Our only hope is to outrun him.”

There is silence as they all think the same thing.

Suddenly, the boat lurches, throwing Steve against the wheel, Billy reaching to catch him.

“What was that?” Max shouts, looking over the side, “we can’t have run aground.”

Dustin looks just as baffled, “the waters are deep here, that’s impossible.”

Billy looks to Steve in confusion as he rights himself again, only for the boat to give another lurch and skitter through the water a few feet of speed.

“Is it the wind?”

“Can’t be – the sails are still half.”

Steve’s eyes widen and he whips his head around, eyes searching the deck until he sees her standing up on the quarter deck, scrambling her way up to the very bow of the ship, holding her little hand out before her.

“EL!”

If she hears him, she doesn’t react, just plants her feet, her blanket

falling off her shoulders and crumbling to the ground, Billy's coat swamping her body and he watches as she flexes her fingers, arms down by her sides and the boat gives another lurch, then its moving forwards, faster only slightly, but faster all the same.

"*She's* doing this?" Billy asks in a breathless rush, wide eyes on El's figure at the front of the ship and Steve just nods.

"Is that the magic girl!?" Dustin exclaims, nearly dropping his booklet as his eyes go wide as saucepans.

The boat skitters to a slow crawl again, back to the pace it has been at and El bends, bracing her hands on her knees.

"She's too weak," Steve realizes, looking behind him to where Modine's fleet is still in pursuit, though further than they were before.

Billy looks in thought, then turns wild eyes to Steve, "will it be easier to hold Modine back for her?"

"What?"

"Would she be able to hold him back instead of pulling us, if we can get out but he can't move, it will give us enough to get out of the bay and onto the seas and the wind can pick us up there, can she do that?"

Steve looks to El, still flexing her fingers, trying to shift the heavy boat through the water. He's never fully understood her powers, he has no idea what is too much for her, he can only ask her to try.

He leaps down to the main deck and runs to where the stairs for the quarter deck are, hauling himself up to her.

"El," she turns to him, blood dripping from her nose.

"I'm sorry, Steve, it's too heavy," she says weakly.

He holds her by her shoulders, "no, EL, you did amazing," he tells her sincerely. He's always been encouraging with her powers. They are unique and mysterious and scare some of their folk, but he thinks she

truly is amazing and always encouraged her to practice with them.

“El, the bad man’s fleet is behind us and they are catching up. Do you think you could slow them down instead of moving us? Would that be easier?”

She wipes her nose on the back of her hand and nods. Steve lifts her into his arms and carries her past the curious stares of the crew and back up to where Billy stands waiting. He looks at her with curious eyes and kneels when Steve sets her down.

“If you can stop them, or even just make them slow, I would be in your debt,” he tells her seriously.

She assesses him for a moment then nods, turning and scrambling up to where she can see Modine’s fleet behind them. Steve hovers behind her, ready to catch her if she gets too weak and falls. She takes a deep breath and raises her hands, her fingers flexing.

The ships behind them shudder and stall, they slow their pace and El gasps but keeps going.

“Drop oars!” Billy shouts and there is splashing on either side of the ship. Huge oars protrude from slits in the side and dip into the water. They move in unison, digging and dragging and the boat is moving faster and Billy turns the wheel with well-practiced movement as they turn their way to the crescent entrance.

El shudders and the boats are still moving towards them, but the distance is growing and they are moving faster than before and finally, finally they turn out and into the open water.

The crew erupt from below in cheers, reeling the oars back in at Billy’s command and Steve catches El as she sags and slumps back against him.

Her nose is bleeding from both nostrils now and he wipes it away with his sleeve.

Max appears by his side, holding the blanket from Billy’s bed and drapes it across El’s body, giving her a small, kind smile when she turns tired brown eyes to her. They close and she slumps in Steve’s

arms and he tucks the fabric around her, making sure she is warm and covered before struggling to his feet.

The boat sails into open waters and the sails fill with wind and they are cutting through the sea foam, picking up speed as Dustin expertly reads the wind and keeps them in its passage.

Billy turns to him, looking exhausted and pale and walks with him to the cabin, crew patting his back as he passes, Lucas giving medical attention to those who need it most.

The cabin is quiet after the tumultuous events in the town and Steve lays El on his side of the bed gently, tucking the sheet around her and wiping the remaining blood from her top lip with a rag Billy hands him. She breathes deeply and slowly, but otherwise seems okay, just needing rest.

Steve turns to Billy and the blond meets his embrace, wrapping heavy arms around his shoulders and Steve burrows his face into his neck, arms around his waist, holding him tight and sighing.

“That was too close,” Billy says into his hair, hands rubbing almost frantically at his back

Steve pulls away pushes the hair away from the bloody side of his face and Billy ducks out of his touch, “Is fine, Steve, just a cut, got a gun butt to the face is all.”

“I thought you got shot,” he says, voice hoarse.

Billy shakes his head, presses his forehead to Steve’s and holds him, swaying with the movements of the boat, “I’m lucky, remember, I’m golden,” he tries to joke, but both of them find little humor in it.

He’s got too many questions running about in his mind, all of Modine and everything that happened there. But the crew are not resting yet, they are still with a fleet behind them and they don’t have time to talk just yet.

Billy wipes the blood on his face away with the rag he used for El and they return to the deck to help the crew keep the ship on course and as far away from that island and Modine as they can.

7. Chapter 7

Summary for the Chapter:

He looks about the cabin, breathing in the smell of Billy's smoke and his soaps and the musk of old wood and the woven sheets and tapestries. He watches trinkets and lanterns hanging from the overhead boards sway to and fro. He watches the light glinting off the objects and things scattered all around. This place feels like home. This little room feels so safe to him. Its small and intimate and smells like Billy and the thought of leaving it and never seeing it again makes him want to cling on to the wooden posts of the bed and refuse to let go.

"El needs to go home," he says slowly, watching Billy's face closely as the blond avoids his eye again. He nods, focusing on the toe of his boots, suddenly finding them very interesting.

Steve stays by El's side for most of the day. He went out to help keep the ship underway, Modine's fleet still in pursuit but too far out to be any danger of canon fire or catching up. Billy and Dustin are a good team; they read the wind and steer the boat carefully to keep her in its course. They know which way to guide the sails and it is so much more complicated that Steve gave them previous credit for.

Billy stayed at the helm with his brow furrowed and looked behind him too many times for Steve not to notice. The sky was cast with ominous looking clouds as the night rolled in slowly, painting the place in a dull grey and the mood settled into quiet. The water rushed by at their sides, the gulls were even quiet in the air. The Island fast retreating behind them, smoke still rising to greet the night.

With his tasks done, Steve found some food and brought it to El and prodded her awake. Her eyes were heavy in her face, her skin dry and she looked exhausted. She didn't speak, ate a few scraps of food, allowed Steve to tip a glass of water to her mouth for her to drink

then fell back into the sheets and slept. Little snores filled the small space and Steve stayed, sitting in Billy's seat which he had dragged to her side of the bed and watched over her.

He is lighting the few lanterns scattered about when Billy clicks the door open gently and steps into the room. He looks weary but gives him a small smile, setting his hat down on the desk and gathering Steve into his arms.

The Siren goes willingly, feeling the embrace like a balm on burned skin. He's been itching and jittery since they left the island and hadn't realised until now that Billy's presence was what he had been looking for.

He burrows his nose into Billy's neck, breathes him in deeply and closes his eyes, losing himself for a moment in his embrace, letting everything else fall away. Billy holds him sure and steady, fingers tracing little circles on his lower back, the other buried in his hair, scraping lightly over his scalp.

"How is she?" he asks into his hair and Steve tilts his head - reluctant to let go - just enough to peer over at El's sleeping form.

"Exhausted. Her powers take a lot out of her as well as being out the water. I haven't managed to find out how long it's been for her, she's only been awake for a moment or two."

Billy hums and runs a hand up and down Steve's spine, the Siren sinking further into his embrace at the touch, tiredness rolling over him in waves.

"Well, the good news is Modine seems to have given up the pursuit – his fleet have fallen back."

Steve sighs at the words, lifting his head to look into Billy's tired face, "good. Do you think he will give up on you for now?"

A shadow passes behind those blue eyes and he feels him stiffen a little in his arms, looking away to somewhere beyond Steve, "I don't think so."

Steve peers at him, anxiety building up in the pit of his chest, "you

don't think?"

Billy huffs, pulls away and picks up his pipe and loads it. Steve watches the stiff ridge of his shoulder, pulled tight up near his ears and settles on the end of the bed when Billy turns and leans back against the tabletop, a match lighting the end of his pipe. He flicks it out and discards the burnt-out stick and takes a deep drag, eyes on Steve. When he speaks, he blows out the smoke with it.

"There's a lot of stories surrounding him, some are old wife's tales, but a lot of them are true."

"Like what?"

Billy takes another, deep drag and smoke billows out his mouth and nostrils, curling and hanging in the air between them, catching the low candlelight.

"There are stories, from his Pirate days. They said that for him to gain the power he has and be the most feared on the sea, he sold his soul. They say he has a great beast do his bidding. Kraken, Leviathan, Flayer, it has many names. Something that lies in slumber at the bottom of the ocean – further down than any other being can venture. They say he summons the beast to him and it obeys his call. That's how he managed to massacre so many Sirens and Pirates alike."

Billy avoided his eyes as he spoke. The Man of Modine had already paved a dark road beneath his feet just from seeing how Billy reacted to him. The man was white haired and old, thin but the way he had looked around at the death being caused at his hands had chilled Steve to the bone. The moment he had caught sight of Billy, the rage and absolute joy of a hunt that had overcame his features had turned Steve's stomach. He was just what he had expected humans to be. Looking at Billy now, he knows that even if these are tall tales, they have some truth, Modine has a reputation that is not to be taken lightly.

More than that, Steve had watched him take lives without a care and could not help but think of his own people. He knew what they had told him was true. That man had massacred hundreds, if not

thousands of his own people, slaughtering them and wiping them out of the sea like waste in a net. It angered Steve. How had he never been told of this? Did the Chief know? Was he the reason they hid in their safe places and never dared venture to far? All because of this one, ruthless, man.

“Do you believe it?”

Billy shrugged, tonguing at the end of his pipe, still avoiding Steve’s eyes, “the years I have spent at sea, I have seen many things any lesser man would not believe.” He chuckles, glancing to El, “I’ve seen a Siren with magic powers. The man does not have a reputation for nothing. I wouldn’t put it past him to have a beast of the sea at his command.”

“What are you going to do now?”

Billy sighs out the last of his smoke and sets the pipe down on the desk, his hands on the edge either side of his hips. Finally, he looks up at Steve.

“We’re looping back around, I’m taking you back to the waters we stole you from.”

Steve’s eyes widen in surprise.

“If we stay on course and have the wind in our favor – Dustin says we will, it shouldn’t be more than three days to get around there.”

A heavy silence hangs in the air and it’s Steve’s turn to avoid his eyes. He isn’t sure what to say, what it is he *wants* to say. It feels like cold hands curl around his heart at the words and his stomach jolts in something and it just feels like something he doesn’t want to do.

He looks over to the lump in the bedding where EL still lies. He needs to get her home. He won’t let her go alone. He needs to make sure she gets back safe, needs to see it with his own eyes. But him? Somehow, the image of him returning home feels odd. It feels like something he can’t fully picture, like something that doesn’t fit into his line.

He looks about the cabin, breathing in the smell of Billy’s smoke and

his soaps and the musk of old wood and the woven sheets and tapestries. He watches trinkets and lanterns hanging from the overhead boards sway to and fro. He watches the light glinting off the objects and things scattered all around. *This* place feels like home. This little room feels so safe to him. Its small and intimate and smells like Billy and the thought of leaving it and never seeing it again makes him want to cling on to the wooden posts of the bed and refuse to let go.

“El needs to go home,” he says slowly, watching Billy’s face closely as the blond avoids his eye again. He nods, focusing on the toe of his boots, suddenly finding them very interesting.

The silence breaks with soft rustling coming from the bedding and they both turn as El’s head appears from beneath the sheets as she sits up and looks about, hair sticking up in all directions. Steve springs into action, hurrying over to her side. She looks better, there is more color to her cheeks and she smiles when he draws near.

“El, how do you feel?” he asks when he nears her, eyes flitting over every inch of her. She looks better; less pale, less dry, healthier and more alive.

The brunette nods and sits up some more, accepting the mug of water from Steve and drinking eagerly. Her brown eyes flick to Billy as he moves closer to hover behind Steve, watching him warily, but Steve is relieved to see her pupils staying nice and round.

“El, he’s Billy, remember? He helped me rescue you from the Merchant?”

She watches him in silence, just like she did before and just like before, Billy stands silent, holding her gaze, letting the little Siren-daughter assess him.

She lowers her drink when it is done, licking her lips and wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, “Not a bad man.”

Billy looks a bit confused but Steve is grinning, understanding. He takes the empty mug off her and sets it on the floor.

“You’re right, El, you’re safe here. Do you want to try walking?”

She nods and scrambles out of the bed, giving an unexpected burst of energy. She wobbles a little on the unsteady swaying of the ship, but holds her balance. She smiles up at Steve in her grubby rags that the Merchant must have gave her and the sight warms his heart.

He kneels, pulls her into his arms and holds her close. She returns the embrace, burying her face into his shoulder and he feels his throat tighten.

“What happened, El? Why did you follow me?”

She pulls away, her nose scrunched up, “Hop sent the Warriors, they searched three days. Useless. I could see you.”

She tilts her head to meet her finger which she raises to tap twice against her temple, “I saw you in the empty place. You were in a cage.”

Billy shuffles uncomfortably behind Steve. The Siren sighs, trying to work out how to explain this to her, but knowing she already knows in her own way.

“I was, but I’m not anymore – I’m free, I’m happy.”

The word is out before he really thinks it through and he clamps his mouth down around it, senses focusing on Billy behind him but he gives no audible reaction to his words.

El’s dark eyes follow the exchange, narrowing slightly then widening in realisation. Steve will never get used to her way of just knowing what is going on.

Billy clears his throat, coming closer and leaning over Steve’s shoulder to plop a small bundle of clothes on the bedding near El.

“Here, they used to be Max’s – my sister, I think they will fit you. I forgot I had them.”

Steve picks them up and sees a nice, simple dress. It’s in a grey/blue colour, like the sea during a storm. It has little white flowers

embroidered around the neckline. There is a white skirt of linen like material that Steve guesses is to go beneath and he turns to give Billy a grateful smile as he leaves the room to lend them their privacy.

Steve patiently explains to El about the clothes and how to put them on, then he turns his back, looking out the window as she changes. His people may not be bothered by clothes and covering themselves, but being in human form somehow feels strangely vulnerable and different. He would rather leave her to her own devices but lingers in case she needs help. He hears her shuffle and stumble a little but she doesn't ask for his help, so he remains where he is. After a time, a small tap on his shoulder has him turning around and there she stands.

She looks so different – more put together and somehow older. Her hair is still wild and her cheeks are still dirty, but she beams at him, sashaying her hips to make the skirt of her dress splay and sway around her. It fits her well, like it had been made for her.

He retrieves a cloth and dips it into some of the water Billy keeps in his flagon for washing his face and shaving and cleans up El's cheeks with it, she grimaces but remains still, letting him.

“Was...is Chief angry with me?” he asks carefully.

El shrugs, “not angry. Scared, sad. He thought you went to find your parents again.”

Steve's heart twinges.

Hopper has been the only real parental figure in his life since his parents left. He had been the one who was there with him all the while. In his teen years, he had rebelled, tried to get out and find them, clawed and hissed and bit at Hopper but the Chief had refused to give in, knowing he would only get hurt or killed.

As he grew, he appreciated Hopper for what he had done for him. He helped where he could, trained the younglings with him, taught the human tongue and any others he knew, and he never tried to find his parents again.

He did want to explore though, so much. It was always what he thought of, seeing all the corners of the world and learning all the different human races and cultures. Hopper never understood it, told him he would be putting himself in danger for nothing. Steve had thought him a scared, old man, but now, after what he has seen and learned, he knows Hopper was right to be scared – for his people, and what could happen to them at the hands of a man like Modine.

He frowns, realising he zoned out into his own thoughts and raises his eyes to make an excuse to El, but there she stands, her face now clean full of knowing. She smiles softly at him.

“You are happy here.”

Steve smiles back at her, “I am.”

“You want to stay.”

He isn't sure what to say to that. Its useless to deny it, he knows.

It feels like an age since they first dragged him from the water and held him on the ship. How much has changed since that day. He has gone from a hissing and spiting at the humans surrounding him to calling them friends.

How long he had spent among his own people not entirely content, not entirely feeling like he belongs. He loves his people, he loves his home, but there was always something – some part of him that wanted more. He feels like he has got a taste of whatever that voice inside him had been calling for. He has seen so much in so little time and learned more than he ever imagined. He has drank with humans, danced with pirates, walked among them as one of them. He has learned the workings of the ships that so fascinated him as a youngling. He has been embraced by this crew and this life like he has always been here. Robin, Heather, Lucas, Dustin, Max, Jack, Scully, Maggie, Charlie – the names go on, each one coming fondly to his mind like the faces of his people.

And Billy. The enigma that he is. This half human, half Siren. This Pirate King that Steve had vowed to despise and wanted nothing more than to escape him in the beginning. Now, Steve doesn't know

how to go back to a life where he doesn't know him. There is so much about him that he likes. His laugh, his smile, that gleam in his eyes when he catches Steve's gaze with a secret smile. The way he rules fair and strong, how he *learned* Steve.

The way he is sailing his ship back to return Steve to his people safely. Steve feels his stomach twists with every wave the boat treads. He wants to somehow drop the anchor in secret, or the winds to slow or something, anything. He wants the ship to wait, he wants more time. He doesn't want to leave just yet.

But he needs to get El back home, he reasons, looking back to her where she sits, her face soft with that knowing look on her face.

"Will you stay?" she asks, as if its so simple.

He shakes his head, fingers playing with the damp cloth still in his hand, "I don't know if I can."

El tilts her head, "he wants you to stay."

Steve furrows his brow before realising she is talking about Billy. Her brown eyes look somewhere beyond him, not at anything in the room, beyond it to something Steve won't ever fully understand.

"He is a storm. There is so much inside him. It is calm when he is with you."

Steve shakes his head, heart tight in his chest, "he's not like us, though, El. Humans they – they do things different."

She shrugs, "he is half like us. He feels things like we do. He has been looking for his bonded too. You have found each other."

Steve's heart thunders in his chest. Hope blooms like a late flower in his chest and he wants, so much for what El is saying to be real.

"Chief won't allow it."

She rolls her eyes, "he isn't always right. He will see. You will show him."

Steve drops his gaze to his lap, head buzzing with a thunderstorm of thoughts. It isn't so simple, he wants to tell her, but the excuse is feeble even to him. He shakes away the thoughts. The toll of the day and the emotions burning up inside him are making him jittery and he doesn't think he can handle another heartfelt talk. He needs air, he needs to see the sea, he needs the crew and their noise and Billy and his comforting presence and to let his thoughts sort themselves out.

"He's taking us home," he says instead, fiddling with the cloth in his hands, "Billy is taking us home."

El's looks like she wants to say something, but Steve silently pleads with her to leave it. He's not sure he can handle it right now, his mind already scrambled. Thankfully, she relents, nodding and stands when he does.

"Come on," he says, tossing aside the cloth, taking her hand, "You should meet the crew."

V

When the sun sets, the ship is in a better mood.

They are the only vessel to be seen from horizon to horizon, sailing along the course Dustin set for them. Water froths and sprays at the sides, night air filling the sails and pulling them along. The setting sun bathes the sky in its colours and the water is painted with its reflection.

The crew have their meal and singing as usual, barrels brought out and games and gambling.

Steve drinks from his wine, content to lean against the rails on the quarter deck and looks down at them all going about their business. El sits to the starboard side of the deck, smiling as she strokes the ear of one of the goats Maggie has on ropes next to her, letting them get some exercise and fresh air. The old woman smiles kindly and hands a small sack of grain to the Siren to feed and El grins when the animal stuffs its face eagerly into the contents.

Max sits by her side, smiling as she watches the exchange. El quickly made friends with the crew, especially the younglings. Most of them held her in regard for helping them escape, marvelling at her power and thanking her with gracious bows and a few cheers.

Dustin bounced over to her almost as soon as they walked on deck, notebook at the ready to shower her with questions, but Lucas and Max had quickly stepped in to supervise. Now, he sits next to them, trying to shoo away one of the pigs that has eyes on his pages and is limited to questions by Max who gives him a nod when he looks like he is about to explode if she doesn't know the answers he seeks.

A noise draws Steve's attention and he turns to see Billy mounting the steps to where he leans, a mug in hand, flashing him a grin as he nears, that lovely familiar glint in his eyes.

He sidles up next to Steve, the ocean hair toying with his curls and presses his side against Steve's as he watches El laugh.

"She fits in just as well as you do here," he says with a fond smile.

Steve lets himself enjoy the warmth of Billy pressed against him and the ambiance of the ship and the crew and watches El stroke the head of the goat again.

"She's been through a lot. She was weaker than I've ever seen her, she really pushed herself," he continues. He turns soft eyes to Billy and the blond's cheek lifts at one corner and he rests a soft gaze on his eyes, lips curling at the corners.

“If it wasn’t for her, we wouldn’t have gotten away,” he says softly, glancing to her, then back to him. He hesitates for a moment, looking away and giving a stiff chuckle.

“I was terrified. All I could think was Gods, please, don’t let him get hurt. Keep him safe.”

His words are unexpectedly vulnerable and they warm Steve’s heart and he can’t help it. He sets his mug on the wood railing and leans into Billy, the blond opening his arms to him and Steve rests his head in the curve of his neck. He sighs contently, Billy cards gentle fingers through his hair and presses a kiss to his head.

Steve lifts his gaze and Billy’s face is open and Steve can read each emotion as it crosses his features. His eyes shine and he looks so young, so vulnerable and so human. Steve drinks the sight in, fascinated with the twitch at the corner of his mouth, the way his brows lift a little at the centre of his brow, the way he breathes deep and slow out of soft lips.

Steve tilts his head back, eyes narrowing in on those curved lips and Billy’s hand comes up to cup his jaw as he meets his kiss.

Steve’s fingers curl into the fabric of Billy’s shirt at his hips, wanting him close, feeling like if he lets go, he will open his eyes and all of this will disappear around him. Billy makes a soft noise against his mouth when Steve presses closer, kisses firmer, suddenly wanting to bury himself in Billy’s very skin.

Billy breaks away and Steve nearly stumbles in chasing his mouth. His eyes are dark, pupils blown wide, gaze heavy. He is breathing heavier and his fingers trace across Steve’s skin quickly.

“Can I talk to you?” he says, voice low and gravelly and curling something low in Steve’s belly.

He nods, making a conscious effort to let go of Billy’s shirt and follow him as he turns towards the cabin. He glances to El, but she is paying him no mind, speaking to Dustin, Max and Lucas listening to her every word as the curly headed boy scribbles her words down in his book at an alarmingly fast pace.

Billy holds one of the cabin doors open for him and he feels his stomach flutter when he enters the room. He hovers by the end of the bed, watching Billy click the door shut behind himself.

The blond takes a deep, steadying breath, blowing the air out of his nostrils. He looks nervous, like he is unsure of himself and it is something Steve never imagined he would see on him.

“You talked about your people, and how they have one person.”

Billy’s voice is so soft, low and rumbling and intimate between them and Steve can feel this moment like holding a precious gem in his hand that he is desperate not to drop and shatter.

Steve’s heart leaps in his chest, his stomach fluttering, his voice is hoarse when he speaks, “yes?”

Billy’s eyes trail across his face and rest on his lips, open as he tries not to pant with the anxious anticipation thrilling through his body, “I have been with many - men and women. But I - I never felt anything, not like...”

He looks into Steve’s eyes and the Siren stops breathing.

“I want you to stay,” he says almost in a rush, taking a small step towards him, “I want you to stay here – with me.”

He’s speaking faster, in a rush to get everything out and Steve’s brain stumbles to keep up with his words. Billy licks his lips and takes another step closer, then another and Steve laments on how he is that one tiny inch still shorter than him.

“I know I’m just half your kind and I can’t speak to this, but I want you, all the time, so much. I know this is something more.”

He’s so close and his face is so open and he’s saying the words Steve has been waiting a lifetime to hear and his blood is rushing in his ears and his heart is thundering and his stomach leaps and his heart soars.

“Billy...”

He realises with a start, this is everything he has been looking for

without really knowing it.

He has watched people come and go from his life; his parents, his friends, Nancy – he's gotten so used to being alone that he never really thought he would find someone. All he had ever wanted really was to be *known* by someone. For someone to look at him and see something worth staying for.

Here, stands his enigma of a person. Half human, half Siren, a Pirate King, everything Steve never in a million years imagined and somehow, there he is, standing there, holding on to him and looking at him like he is the only thing in the world.

His heart swells in his chest and Billy looks at him so unsure and hopeful and he wants it, so much, all of it.

He raises his hand and sinks his fingers into soft curls and Billy meets him in a fierce kiss.

Steve sighs into his mouth, Billy's hands suddenly everywhere, holding him close, burning like fire through the thin material of his shirt to brand against his very skin. Steve clings back, tangling fingers into those golden locks and tugging a little and thrilling at the low noise it elicits from the human.

Billy licks his way into his mouth and Steve shivers, tasting honeyed wine and smoke and heat simmers in his gut. He sucks on Billy's tongue, drags teeth gently against that plush, lower lip and Billy moans, a low, rumbling sound that resonates through Steve's body. He tugs him closer, slides a leg between his own and Steve gasps, breaking the kiss with it when he finds himself bucking into the feeling as Billy's thigh rubs against where he is hardening.

Billy's eyes are nearly all black, his pupils blown wide and he's panting into his mouth and he tugs Steve's shirt out of his trousers, gets his hands on his skin and Steve shivers, whimpering at his calloused palms running over soft, sensitive skin.

He moans Billy's name when the blond runs his mouth across the expanse of his neck, tilting his head back to allow more room when he feels Billy's tongue running across his pulse point, teeth following

after. He presses hot, wet issues to his skin, shivers cascading across Steve's body and he clings helplessly to him, fisting his hair, his shirt, wanting more and not sure how to get it.

Billy makes a noise of annoyance, breaking away only to tug his shirt up, over his head and throwing it carelessly to the floor, helping Steve with his own as he follows his movements. When it is gone, he hauls Steve to him again, claiming his mouth once more and swallows Steve's moan at the feeling of Billy's soft skin rubbing against him.

Every touch of the blond is like ecstasy. The energy that has always been there between them is alive and buzzing all around them. Everything feels so heightened and Steve feels so alive and he wants to chase the way he feels when he is with this human forever, he never wants it to end.

"I want to stay," he hears himself say, voice quiet and deep, "I want to be with you."

Billy's face is serious when he looks at him, his eyes burning and his hands never stop touching him. He is vaguely aware of them moving, Billy walking him backwards until he tumbles back onto the bed and looks up as Billy kicks off his boots and crawls up the length of Steve's body, the mattress dipping beneath his weight.

"You're so perfect," Billy rumbles, grinning as Steve tugs him down to smother his body with his, wrapping his legs around his waist to hold him close.

"Perfect," he says again as Steve leans up to kiss his neck, licking the salt of his skin and digging his blunt nails into his hips.

"More, Billy, please," he hears himself sigh out and Billy turns his head to kiss him again, then the corner of his mouth, his jaw, down the line of his throat, across his chest and palming at the skin over his racing heart.

The blond's curls fall across his skin, one sliding across his nipple which makes him shiver and Billy grins before tilting his head and wrapping his mouth around it. Steve arches of the bed, electricity

shooting down to his groin, his breeches already straining against him. Billy sucks at him, tongue working across the sensitive peak before gently scraping his teeth. Steve can't help the little sighs and gasps that escape him and he can only cling to the sheets and Billy kisses his way over to the other and repeats his actions.

"Billy...Billy -"

He's not sure what he's asking for, he just knows he wants more, more of this, all of it, all of Billy, he feels like he is on fire.

The human hums, kisses his sternum and drags hands down his sides. He looks up at Steve through his curls which fall across his face, "you make such pretty sounds, little Siren," he says, tonguing his way across the plane of Steve's stomach, his muscles and skin jumping as he moves over sensitive spots.

"I want to hear them all," he continues, sliding his nails softly across the light smattering of hair that runs down his navel, "I'm going to learn every last one of them."

Steve watches, enthralled as Billy undoes his breeches with quick, deft fingers, pausing only for a moment to look back up at Steve before sliding them down and off his legs, throwing them to the floor.

Steve's cock springs free, embarrassingly eager looking; flushed and leaking at the tip, lying heavy across his stomach. He bites his lips, watches Billy stare at it with dark eyes, fumbling with his own trousers, hurriedly discarding them.

His own cock hangs heavy between his legs where he kneels over Steve, it's not as long but thicker than him, a smattering of dark blond curls around the base. He watches as Billy curls a finger and thumb around himself, holding there firmly as his eyes roam over Steve, trying to calm his arousal and it only serves to make Steve leak more pre come onto his own stomach.

"Billy -"

The human sighs, lowers himself between Steve's legs and without any warning, licks up the wetness from his skin, then licks a hot, wet

stripe up the length of him.

Steve cants his head back against the pillows, a low moan escaping him at the feeling. Billy's hands are hot and firm, holding his hips as he wriggles and bucks, pressing him into the mattress and keeping him still.

He feels that tongue lick around his head and he bows his chin to look down as Billy wraps his lips around him and sucks him deep into his throat.

Steve's mouth falls open in a gasp, Billy's eyes on him, almost all black, his cheeks hollowing as he sucks him down further until Steve can feel the press of the back of his throat. Billy starts to move his head, bobbing back and forth in long, tight pulls, his mouth hot and wet and feeling like nothing Steve has ever imagined. He moves faster and Steve pants as he watches the way Billy's lips pull tight around him, shiny with spit. Billy runs a hand across Steve's chest, the other still holding his hip and Steve clings to his fingers with one hand, needing something to stay anchored to as he feels himself rushing closer to release.

Billy brings his hand to his own head, leading Steve to bury his fingers in his curls again and guide him, but Steve is content to let him go at his own pace, every lick, every movement careening him closer to the edge. Billy sinks further than before, pressing Steve all the way into his throat until his nose is buried against his skin and he swallows and it is such a tight, pulsing movement around his straining flesh that Steve's fingers tighten in those curls and tug harshly. He worries for a moment he has hurt the human, but he hears Billy groan and more than that, he *feels* it. A myriad of vibrations that pulse around him and resonate right to his gut and he moans, gasps and tries to wiggle but Billy is still holding him down and he's still moaning and still swallowing around him and sucking and Steve can't even give him a warning before he is coming.

He feels himself release down Billy's throat and the human grips him tighter by the hips, and his eyes flick up to meet Steve's as he swallows, drooling a little with it, eyes watering and cheeks flushed and looking so goddamn amazing that Steve thinks he is in danger of coming all over again.

He collapses back onto the bedding as his release subsides and Billy slides him out of his mouth giving the sensitive head one last, lingering lick, grinning as Steve whines and jerks.

“Fuck,” he says, his voice hoarse and breathless. He licks his lips like he is savoring Steve’s taste and Steve has to close his eyes in a long blink at the sight, in danger of passing out from the blood rushing back south.

“You’re amazing,” he says, a little breathless, pawing at those curls, wanting the human to come back up and smother him again.

Billy seems all too eager to comply, crawling his way up Steve’s body and kissing him, licking into his mouth and Steve can taste himself and it makes him shudder at the lewdness of it all. Billy settles down against him, his hardness pressing into Steve’s hip and he shifts, gets a hand between them and wraps it around him.

He’s so hard, the skin soft like velvet and hot and Billy shudders out a moan, bucking into Steve’s grip when he slides his hand up and runs his thumb over the wet head.

“Please ... don’t stop,” he says into Billy’s mouth, squeezing him again and delighting in how he gives a full body shudder, whimpering against Steve’s lips, arms wobbling where they are braced against the bed, holding himself up.

“Stevie,” he sighs, hips giving little, needy thrusts as Steve strokes him deliberately slowly, fingers just shy of a proper grip, “anything, whatever you want -”

He cuts off with a low groan when Steve grips him firmer, pulls him closer, spreads his legs and slides them around Billy’s hips. The blond falls forwards, bracing his forearms on the mattress either side of Steve’s hips, falling into the space Steve has made for him between his legs. Steve lets go of him, lets his hardness slide across the flat of his lower stomach, looks up into those eyes.

“I want you,” he says, surprising himself with his upfront-ness, now knowing exactly what he wants and how he can let himself have it, “I want you inside me.”

Billy bites his lip, dragging his eyes over Steve's face, skin flushed, breathing heavier and he bucks his hips a little, dragging the head of his cock against Steve's skin. Steve lies back, lips pulling into a knowing smirk, drinking in the way Billy looks utterly lost in him, eyes eating him up.

"Are you sure?"

His voice is strained, low, nearly a growl and it makes Steve glow. The way he is so lost, so drunk on Steve but knows what this means for him, wants this to be his decision and to be sure he knows what he wants.

Steve shifts, digs his elbow into the mattress to pull himself up just that little distance until his own cock which is already filling again can brush against Billy's. He looks into the human's eyes, shivering under the intense gaze, looking him right in the face and nodding.

Billy surges forwards kisses him like he's drowning and Steve is the last breath of air. He sinks his body down and slides their cocks together, the wetness there easing the movement and Steve moans, throwing his head back on the sheets and listens to the noises Billy makes as he moves his hips with him.

"Come on, Billy," he breathes out, "I need you now, I won't last if you don't."

He feels Billy press a kiss to his chest, feels the drag of his soft hair against his skin. He feels his hands gentle but firm on his thighs, spreading them and pushing up so his knees bend and lifts his hips enough to slide one of the pillows beneath his lower back.

He feels him move off him all together, just his hands holding his legs apart remain and Steve frowns, moving to dip his head down to see what he's doing but then there is a hot, wet slide of something against his entrance and he shouts out in surprise and pleasure at the sensation.

He feels it again, firmer and he rolls his head to the side and is amazed to see Billy crouched near the end of the bed, head buried between his thighs and Steve can't help the noises he makes when he

feels him lick him again and again.

It's nothing he has ever felt before. Its alien but not unpleasant – on the contrary, its incredible. Billy's tongue is deft and he knows what he's doing, licking flat across his hole then pressing kisses around it. Steve can do nothing more than fist his hands in the sheets and pant up at the canopy, mind scrambling to keep up with the sensations, every nerve in his body alight.

Billy presses his tongue in, spearing gently inside, licking at his walls as he goes, sliding out to lick him again before once more sliding in. Billy's making little, soft moaning sounds and Steve loves that he is feeling pleasure from this too. He works his tongue inside him, head canting back and Steve feels his legs tremble and his body feels like its floating above the mattress.

A finger slides in next to his tongue and Steve grips the sheets, feeling the slow, steady burn and Billy stretches him, being so gentle, tongue working him to distract from the pinch. Another joins when he relaxes and Steve's hand flies down to cling to Billy's fingers where they still hold his thigh and the blond slows, licking again, moving just enough to get him used to the feeling and trying so hard not to hurt him.

He removes the fingers all together and wraps his hand around Steve's cock which is leaking and jerking against his stomach at this point and he gives him one long, tight squeeze, flicking a thumb across his head and it washes some pleasure across his body and his tongue I still working him and Steve is babbling, making noises he never has before and he's careening so close, skittering on the edge.

Billy gives him one last lick then surges up, leans across Steve to the table beside the bed, fumbling with the bottles and objects there and coming back with a small, dark blue vial of oil.

He watches Steve's face, settles between his thighs as he coats his fingers with the stuff and returns two to his hole, sliding them in slowly. Its easier now, Steve doesn't feel any pain, only the wonderful feeling of being filled and the heady stretch of his ring around them.

He watches Billy's face, the blond dragging heavy gaze across all of

him, looking down at him like he is a treasure. He adds a third, working them slowly in and then he shifts, curls them and Steve jerks, electricity sparkling all across him as he presses against something there.

“B-Billy, yes -”

Billy grin and does it again, sliding his fingers in and out, curling them against that spot inside until Steve is panting, hips bucking, cock blurting out more wetness where it slides across his stomach.

“Billy, please,” he begs, “I want you – I’m ready.”

Billy nods, pulls his fingers out slowly and coats himself with the oil before capping the bottle and tossing it aside. He gives himself a few long, slow strokes, Steve watching the head disappear in and out the ring of his fingers with his mouth slack, the thought of having him in his mouth suddenly springing to mind and making him drool.

Billy shifts and Steve feels the blunt press of him against his entrance. Billy looks at him and he nods frantically, feeling like he is falling apart at the seams with the wait.

He presses in slowly, the stretch making Steve shudder, biting his lip and wanting more. Billy slides in slowly, inch by inch, Steve tight around him. His mouth is open and his eyes half lidded as he watches the column of Steve’s throat as he cants his head back. He falls forwards, catching himself on his forearms either side of Steve and he curls his hips forwards, pressing in until he is seated fully inside and he lingers there

Steve is a panting mess, legs spread wide around Billy’s hips, hands clinging to his back, nails digging in and feeling so unbelievably full. Billy buries his face in his neck, licking at his skin and hips twitching with the effort to stay still until Steve feels ready. The Siren nods, bucks his hips eagerly, wanting more of this sensation and Billy grunts.

He pulls back out in a long, slow drag until just his head is in, then he bucks back in again, just as slow, fucking him deep and Steve sees stars, feeling him so impossibly hard and pulsing inside him. He

speeds up a little, thrusting in and out in those long slides, but he's going faster, fucking him deep and Steve doesn't care who hears the noises that are tumbling out of his mouth.

Billy leans up on his hands, ducks his head and moans when he can see where he disappears in and out of Steve, looking back at him, curls falling around his face as he thrust into him.

"Fuck, Stevie," he says, voice a wreck, "fuck, you're so tight - you feel so good."

Steve nods, unable to form coherent sentences, just closing his eyes and shivering at the way Billy slides against the place inside him, the sound of the bed rattling against the wall, the wet slap of skin on skin as Billy moves in and out of him.

"Deeper," he hears himself say, his skin feeling like he is going to burst out of it and he just wants Billy deeper, wants to feel every inch of him, wants that press of him as far as it will go.

Billy surges in, hips pressing against Steve's ass and he holds his legs around his waist and moves, rolling to the side, taking Steve with him until he's lying on his back and Steve is straddling his hips.

Steve huffs, hips trembling shuddering as he sits up, Billy sliding impossibly deeper. He pants and looks down at Billy lying there, glowing in the lamplight, skin flushed and panting and eyes heavy, hands holding Steve's hips and biting his lip.

"Fuck," Steve says, hips grinding in little circles, chasing the feeling and his hands braced on Billy's chest. Billy thrusts up and Steve yelps, back arching as he presses right against that spot inside him, making him see stars.

"Come on, baby," Billy is saying, thrusting up again and again until Steve is bouncing up and down, "take what you want."

His voice is wrecked and Steve is moving, leaning back, thrusting his hips back and forth, feeling Billy drag in and out of him, the wet slide of him in and out of his ass, the way he feels so deep, the way he can feel his heart beating through his cock.

His own dick bounces between his legs, leaking at the flushed tip and Billy wraps a hand around him, meeting his thrusts and pumping him in time with them. The blond surges up, cards a hand into Steve's hair and kisses him, holding the back of his head, thrusting his hips and licking into his mouth.

Steve feels himself careening to the edge, moaning into Billy's mouth, bucking into his tight hold around his cock, fucking himself on the hard length of him buried inside.

He comes with a shout, Billy pumping him through it as he shoots hot, white lines between them. He's still moving still chasing the high, greedily grinding his hips on his cock until Billy jerks and Steve shudders, head thrown back as he feels Billy spill inside him.

He trembles as his orgasm subsides, Billy's hand sliding away from him and he falls back, pulling Steve across his chest. He lies there painting, covered in his own come and sweat, the room smelling of it and Billy cards a hand into his hair and sills, panting against his cheek, cock twitching inside him.

"Steve," the Captain sighs, pressing a kiss to his heated skin, hands stroking up his sides as he comes back to himself.

He feels so whole. So close to Billy, so wrapped up in all of him, his smell, his heat, his body. He turns his head heavy limbed and glowing and smiles at the look of complete wonder he sees on his face.

"I'm keeping you," Steve tells him, voice soft and lips curling up at one corner.

Billy smiles, "I'm all yours."

Billy slips out of him gently, Steve grimacing at the odd feeling and the wetness that leaks out of him. he gets a cloth and wets it from the water pitcher, cleans him up gently, pressing little kisses to his shoulder as he does.

When he's back to a semi-normal state, Billy tosses the cloth away and climbs into the sheets, opening his arms to Steve.

“I need to check on El,” Steve says, feeling a little guilty that he left her for so long.

“Heather and Robin will have brought her to their snug, she will be perfectly safe.”

Steve shakes his head, “I’ll feel better seeing her, I won’t be long.”

Billy relents, lying in the sheets contently, watching Steve wrap himself in one of the larger woven blankets and tip toeing his way to the door.

The deck is empty and cold in the night air when he slides his way out. He tiptoes across it to the opening of the stairs that lead to the lower decks, the lanterns out but the moonlight leading his way. He picks his way through the crew where they sleep in their bedding, a few in hammocks until he nears the back.

He finds El in the little cove Heather and Robin claimed as their own. It’s a corner away from the rest of the crew with a patterned shawl draped across a rope strung from the rafters that lends them a little privacy. Bedding lines the floor where Heather and Robin are curled together beneath pretty, embroidered sheets. El lies snuggled and content looking in a hammock next to them.

Steve smiles as he watches her sleep, swaying gently with the movements of the ship.

He leaves her there, satisfied she is safe and happy, climbing the stairs quietly and hurrying back to the warmth of the Cabin.

Billy is where he left him, blinking slowly through tired eyes as he watches Steve close the doors behind him and strip off his sheet, slipping back into the warmth of the sheets.

Billy curls his body around him, holding him close and presses a kiss to his shoulder. Steve falls asleep to the gentle sounds of his snores and the water outside and the creaking of the wooden boards and feel more at home than he ever has.

V

The doors flying open has Steve thrashing awake, blinking in the harsh, morning light as he sits up in the bed, trying to get his bearings.

Billy swears loudly, sitting up too and they both look to where Max is stood in the doorway, looking at them with her face pale and eyes wide.

“It’s him,” is all she says, voice trembling.

There is a pregnant pause, Steve’s sleep addled brain stumbling to comprehend her words.

Billy’s reaction is immediate.

He kicks the sheets off and Max turns her head as he grabs his trousers and throws them on, shirt following.

Steve scrambles to get dressed, finding his shirt and throwing it on, grabbing what he hopes is his trousers and kicking his way into them. By the time Billy has strapped his sword and pistol to himself he is ready and Ma is already gone, the door still open in her wake. He turns to Billy and he looks grey, eyes wide as Steve follows him out on deck.

The crew is a buzz, folk running to and fro, shouts all around.

Billy mounts the steps to the hull two at a time and Steve follows him up, seeing El standing close to Dustin and Lucas, next to Max who looks out in front of them through a long spyglass. She hurries to Steve’s side who wraps an arm around her. Max hands the spyglass to Billy when he nears and Steve looks beyond them, blood running cold

when in the distance, just on the horizon, half hidden in the early morning smog is a line of ships.

“Modine is with him.”

Billy curses, lowering the spyglass and his jaw clenches.

“How the fuck did he get here so fast?”

Steve takes the spyglass from him and looks through it. He sees Modine’s sleet – the five ships flying under his flag. Flanking them are a number of decorated ships, each flying the King’s colours – he learned from Dustin how to identify them. One is larger than the rest, flying a second flag he doesn’t recognise.

“Your Father?” he asks, lowering the spyglass and Max takes it from him.

Steve keeps his eyes on Billy, his jaw looks painfully clenched as he grinds his teeth, glaring out across the length of the boat and water to the armada before them.

“He finally caught up.” He says bitterly, voice low.

“What do we do, Captain?”

Billy sighs, jaw working. He looks about him at the crew, each one of them quiet as they look to their leader. He shakes his head.

“All hands.”

Movement erupts all around, shouts cry out, everyone moving to prepare the ship for battle. Steve hears the shout for the canons, Dustin turns the wheel to face head on, weapons all around are checked and crew are equipped and he stands back, clinging to El as Billy barks his orders, leaping down to the main deck. Steve follows, El close behind.

“Billy,” he says, grabbing on to his sleeve where he stands by the gap in the railing. Billy turns to him, eyes wild and scared, he looks down at El, back to Steve and the look on his face could break Steve’s heart.

“You have to go.”

“What?”

Billy jabs an arm in the direction of the ships, “there is a whole Armada against us, we don’t stand a chance. I said I would get you home and I am keeping my word.”

Steve reaches out to grab on to his sleeve again, “Billy – no!”

The blond jerks out of his grasp, looking to him with a fierce gaze, slitted eyes flashing “Steve!”

He blinks, stills, steps closer to him and takes his hand in both his own.

“This isn’t your fight. I am not going to watch you die. I am not going to watch her die,” he says, pointing at El who watches with wide eyes at Steve’s side.

“You have people who are looking for you, a home that is safe and away from all of this, I should never have dragged you into it. If this is the last thing I do, I am going to make it right.”

Steve clenches his jaw, “I’m not leaving you.”

Billy’s gaze softens. His eyes drag all over Steve, drinking in every inch of him.

The Captain pulls him close and kisses him, a hand cupping his jaw, the other at his hip. He kisses him deeply but gently, like he is memorizing every inch of him.

He pulls away, face soft, “I love you,” he tells Steve, then he shoves him hard and the Siren goes flying back off the side of the ship.

Notes for the Chapter:

I apologize for the delay in this chapter - i just started a new job and the hours are not what I am used to so it took a bit for me to get into a routine and find time to write but now i am hopefully back

at it!